

Democracy in Australia



Edited by Justin Healey

ISSUES
IN SOCIETY

Democracy in Australia

ISSUES
IN SOCIETY

Edited by Justin Healey

 **THE SPINNEY PRESS**

First published by



PO Box 438 Thirroul NSW 2515 Australia
www.spinneypress.com.au

© The Spinney Press 2021.

COPYRIGHT

All rights reserved. Other than for purposes of and subject to the conditions prescribed under the Australian Copyright Act 1968 and subsequent amendments, no part of this publication may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior permission. Inquiries should be directed to the publisher.

REPRODUCTION AND COMMUNICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The Australian Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of the pages of this work, whichever is the greater, to be reproduced and/or communicated by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact:

Copyright Agency Limited, Level 11, 66 Goulburn Street Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: (02) 9394 7600 Fax: (02) 9394 7601 Email: info@copyright.com.au

REPRODUCTION AND COMMUNICATION FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Except as permitted under the Act (for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review) no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Title: Democracy in Australia / edited by Justin Healey.

Series: Issues in Society, Volume 464.

ISBN 978-1-922274-28-1 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-922274-29-8 (PDF)



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

Cover images courtesy of iStock.

| | | |
|------------------|--|----|
| CHAPTER 1 | AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY EXPLAINED | |
| | Democracy in detail | 1 |
| | Defining democracy | 3 |
| | System of government: democracy | 5 |
| | Australian democracy: an overview | 6 |
| | Three levels of government | 7 |
| | Federal elections | 8 |
| | Electoral systems of Australia's parliaments and local governments | 9 |
| | The Australian system of government | 10 |
| CHAPTER 2 | TRUST AND SATISFACTION IN DEMOCRACY | |
| | Where people are satisfied with democracy and why | 14 |
| | Who do you trust? | 16 |
| | Australians highly confident of government's handling of coronavirus and economic recovery: new research | 18 |
| | The health of our democracy also needs protecting in a crisis | 21 |
| | Trust in government hits all-time low | 23 |
| | Electoral democracy in Australia: crisis, resilience and renewal | 25 |
| | Australians' trust in politicians and democracy hits an all-time low: new research | 27 |
| | Which crisis of trust? | 29 |
| | What actually is populism? And why does it have a bad reputation? | 31 |
| CHAPTER 3 | DEMOCRATIC REFORM AND RENEWAL | |
| | Political reform: addressing the decline of public trust in government and democracy | 33 |
| | Sustaining democracy | 33 |
| | Possible reforms to our democracy | 37 |
| | Reforming our democracy – options for renewing democracy in Australia | 38 |
| | Australia needs fixed four-year parliamentary terms | 42 |
| | Democratic accountability | 44 |
| | The three most powerful checks against corruption | 46 |
| | How big money influenced the last federal election – and what we can do to fix the system | 48 |
| | Why do I have to vote, anyway? | 50 |
| | Compulsory voting: yes or no? | 50 |
| | Should Australia lower the voting age to 16? We asked five experts | 52 |
| | Exploring issues – worksheets and activities | 53 |
| | Fast facts | 57 |
| | Glossary | 58 |
| | Web links | 59 |
| | Index | 60 |

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Australia is Volume 464 in the 'Issues in Society' series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC

In a disrupted time of global pandemic and recession, Australia has never been more reliant on clear leadership from its elected representatives, while also requiring greater co-operation among its citizens. Striking a balance between accountability and robust governance is a challenge during an era of reduced trust in political leaders by voters, especially among young people.

The key principles of Australia's democratic society include individual freedoms, justice, tolerance of opposing ideas and representative government. Do these principles still hold true when research points to a growing disconnect between politicians and the people they represent?

This book explains how our democratic system of government functions, examines Australians' levels of trust and satisfaction in their elected leaders, and explores opportunities for democratic reform. How could Australia better function as a modern democratic nation state in the twenty-first century?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Titles in the 'Issues in Society' series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the 'Issues in Society' series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:

- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION

As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES

The 'Exploring issues' section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The 'Web links' section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.

CHAPTER 1

Australian democracy explained

DEMOCRACY IN DETAIL

A FACT SHEET FROM THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION CENTRE

Australia today has a system of government known as a representative democracy. How our Government works is defined in the Australian Constitution.

However, the meaning of democracy in our modern world can be hard to put your finger on. We know it involves governments and elections. And just to make it harder, countries around the world with systems of government considered to be democratic are all different. They have in common a process of regular elections by the people to form government. In Australia we elect our representatives from political parties or independent candidates who then form a Parliament and an Executive Government.

Almost half of the world's countries are today considered democracies of some sort. These include constitutional monarchies like Australia and republics such as the USA.

THE ORIGINS OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY

Many believe that democracy sprung up in Ancient Greece. This was a participatory democracy where all

male citizens voted on each law. Women and slaves were excluded. The word democracy comes from the Greek word *demokratia*. *Demos* means people and *kratos* means power. Together they mean that the people hold the power.

The British who came to Australia after 1788 generally had democratic ideals and principles. The first settlements in Australia were penal colonies and many would not associate convicts with democracy.

Democracy doesn't stand still. It's always changing, adapting and evolving to suit the times.

Over time as our colonies grew they became more democratic. This was helped by convicts being released into the community once their sentences were served and the arrival of free people. The Australian colonies locally adopted English institutions, particularly the traditions of the common law and judicial independence, plus the emerging ideas of representative government (parliaments) and later of responsible gov-



ernment (executive accountability).

By the late 19th century the six colonies were all self-governing. Throughout the second half of that century the leaders of the colonies discussed and debated about whether they should join together to become one country. Delegates gathered at constitutional conventions from 1890 and drafted our Constitution. In 1899 and 1900 the people of the colonies voted through referendums to accept the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. Then on 1 January in 1901 the colonies peacefully joined together in a Federation and each colony became a State.

The Constitution established the rules for our ongoing democratic Australian Government. Australia shares some of our constitutional arrangements with other democracies. Like some others we elect a parliament. Yet unlike most we have compulsory voting. Together, all our democratic constitutional concepts and our interpretations of them give us a democracy that is uniquely Australian.

WHAT DOES OUR CONSTITUTION SAY ABOUT DEMOCRACY?

Sections 7 and 24 refer to our Houses of Parliament being “directly chosen by the people”. There are other basic requirements which are thought to be part of our

Questions

1. Which country first came up with the idea of democracy?
2. What type of democracy does Australia have?
3. Is voting compulsory in Australia for citizens 18 years and over?
4. Is voting for our parliamentary representatives written in the Australian Constitution?

constitutional democracy which cannot be changed without a referendum:

1. That we have a system of voting which gives effect to the people’s selection of representatives
2. Government is by the people, through their representatives
3. We have direct popular elections
4. We have the freedom to discuss political and economic matters
5. The ability to vote should be so general in scope and voting power be shared among voters so that those elected can fairly be seen to be the representatives of the people
6. There be full, equal and effective participation in elections

DEMOCRACY IS SOMETHING THAT EVOLVES

Democracy doesn’t stand still. It’s always changing, adapting and evolving to suit the times. Some of the events that occurred during the early years of Australian colonisation would not be considered right, proper or democratic these days. That’s why the framers of our Constitution left it to Parliament to pass laws about elections. As long as those laws are consistent with the Constitution, Parliament can pass laws on things such as political advertising and donations, whether prisoners can vote, how disputes about elections are solved and how elections are conducted.

The values of the people of the times permeate through Australian democracy. Decisions made by our elected representatives and High Court interpretations of the Constitution also reflect the views of the times. Each generation tries to improve upon the ideas of the last to progress the social, cultural and political values of the community while retaining our founding traditions.

Our democracy is sustained by the people and the institutions of Australia. Our democracy can only continue with the approval of the people and so it is the democratic values of Australians that maintain our democracy. However, democracy relies on each and everyone one of us engaging with our system of government constructively and knowledgeably.

Australian Constitution Centre. *Democracy*. Retrieved from www.australianconstitutioncentre.org.au on 28 July 2020.



DEFINING DEMOCRACY

The **Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House** explains how democracy is defined and the principles on which it is based

KEY DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

The word 'democracy' has its origins in the Greek language. It combines two shorter words: *demos* meaning whole citizen living within a particular city-state, and *kratos* meaning power or rule.

It is generally agreed that liberal democracies are based on four main principles:

- A belief in the individual: since the individual is believed to be both moral and rational;
- A belief in reason and progress: based on the belief that growth and development is the natural condition of mankind and politics the art of compromise;
- A belief in a society that is consensual: based on a desire for order and co-operation, not disorder and conflict;
- A belief in shared power: based on a suspicion of concentrated power (whether by individuals, groups or governments).

THE DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK

A liberal democracy (that is, one that champions the development and wellbeing of the individual) is organised in such a way as to define and limit power so as to promote legitimate government within a framework of justice and freedom.

There are four critical elements to the framework:

- Legitimacy;
- Justice;
- Freedom; and
- Power.

LEGITIMACY

A legitimate government is one that has the appropriate mandate/authority to rule. This usually means a high degree of popular support as demonstrated by a free electorate and frequent elections.

- For example, the government is chosen by a popular vote in which a majority of officials in a majority of electoral regions receive the majority vote; and
- For example, rules are framed to maximize the wellbeing of all or most citizens.

JUSTICE

Justice is achieved when citizens live in an environment in which all citizens are treated equally and accorded dignity and respect. This may occur in a representative democracy that is tempered by constitutionalism, free elections and restraints on power.



- For example, the demands made by vested interest groups seeking special privileges are questioned; and
- For example, society is encouraging of talent and rewards citizens on merit, rather than on rank, privilege or status.

FREEDOM

If freedom is to exist, there must be:

- Self-determination such that citizens may make decisions, learn from them and accept responsibility for them;
- The capacity to choose between alternatives;
- The autonomy to do what the law does not forbid; and where prohibitions do exist, they should be for the common good; and
- Respect for political and civil liberties. For example, government intervention in political, economic and moral matters affecting the citizenry is limited or regulated; and the scope for religious, political and intellectual freedom of citizens is not limited.

POWER

In a liberal democracy efforts are made to define and limit power, often by means of a written constitution. Checks and balances, such as the separation of the Parliament, senior government and judicial power, are instituted. In addition, there are conventions of behaviour and a legal system that complements the political system.

- For example, civil liberties are defended and increased against the encroachment of governments, institutions and powerful forces in society.

DEFINITIONS

There is no absolute definition of democracy. The term is elastic and expands and contracts according to the time, place and circumstances of its use. What follows is a short list of definitions provided by field experts.

Jim Kilcullen

But first, what does democracy mean? In Ancient Greece some cities were democracies, others were oligarchies. Democracy meant rule by the people, oligarchy meant rule by the few. So a city was a democracy if:

- City affairs were subject to an Assembly;
- To which all male citizens belonged;
- And in which decisions were made by simple majority vote.

Andrew Heywood

Rule by the people; democracy implies both popular participation and government in the public interest, and can take a wide variety of forms.

Palgrave Macmillan, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Third edition, 2003, p.330.

Dr John Hirst

Democracy: A democracy is a society in which the citizens are sovereign and control the government.

Papers on Parliament Number 42,
The Distinctiveness of Australian Democracy, p.10/13

Joseph Schumpeter

The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.

Schumpeter adds that 'the classical theory of democracy attributed to the electorate an altogether unrealistic degree of initiative which practically amounted to ignoring leadership.'

Further, Schumpeter claimed that, ... the purpose of democratic method [is] not to select representatives who carry out the will of the people, but to choose individuals who [will] govern on their behalf.

Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p.250

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

- Who are 'the people'? Who is not? Are young people included?
- How is it possible for 'the people' to rule in largely differentiated societies? and
- How do we classify systems in which leaders are not elected but are nevertheless supported by the majority of people?

KEY DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

As proposed by Robert Dahl, Schmitter and Karl, and Larry Diamond.

1. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and

fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.

3. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government.
5. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined.
6. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.
7. Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organisations, including independent political parties and interest groups.
8. Elected officials are able to exercise their powers without fear of being overridden.
9. The polity is self-governing; and able to act independently of constraints imposed by others.
10. People have the freedom to speak and publish dissenting views.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEMOCRACIES

- Direct democracy
- Representative democracy
- Constitutional democracy
- Monitory democracy

Direct democracy

In a direct democracy, such as ancient Athens, all citizens (only adult males who had completed their military training; women, slaves and plebs were not citizens) are invited to participate in all political decisions. This form of democracy is no longer practised. In this form of democracy citizens are continuously involved in the exercise of power and decision is by majority rule.

Representative democracy

In a representative democracy, representatives are elected by the people and entrusted to carry out the business of governance. Australia is a representative democracy.

Constitutional democracy

In a constitutional democracy a constitution outlines who will represent the people and how. Australia is also a constitutional democracy.

Monitory democracy

Political scientist John Keane suggests that a new form of democracy is evolving in which government is constantly monitored in its exercise of power by a vast array of public and private agencies, commissions and regulatory mechanisms. See *Life and Death of Democracy* by John Keane, published by Simon and Schuster UK in 2009.

Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. *Defining democracy*. Retrieved from www.moadoph.gov.au on 28 July 2020.

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: DEMOCRACY

The **Parliamentary Education Office** introduces the idea of democracy and explores the key principles of Australia's democratic system of government. These include individual freedoms, justice, tolerance of opposing ideas and representative government.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Democracy means rule by the people. The word comes from the ancient Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (to rule). A democratic country has a system of government in which the people have the power to participate in decision-making.

Each democracy is unique and works in different ways. In some democracies citizens help make decisions directly by voting on laws and policy proposals (direct democracy). In others, like Australia, citizens choose representatives to make decisions on their behalf (representative democracy).

DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

A democracy relies on the participation of citizens. They participate not just by voting, but by getting involved in their community. This might be by joining a charity, a political party or an environmental or community group.

A democratic society is one that works towards the ideals of democracy:

- Respect for individuals, and their right to make their own choices.
- Tolerance of differences and opposing ideas.
- Equity – valuing all people, and supporting them to reach their full potential.
- Each person has freedom of speech, association, movement and freedom of belief.
- Justice – treating everyone fairly, in society and in court.

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY

Australia's democracy is supported by 4 key ideas (see graphic below).

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Constitutional order – the structure and

powers of the Australian Parliament are written in the Australian Constitution, which also describes the power of the High Court of Australia to decide if laws abide by the Constitution.

- **Liberal democracy** – as a nation, we support the development and wellbeing of individuals.
- **Pluralistic society** – Australian society is diverse with many different ethnic, racial, religious and social groups all existing together.
- **Representative democracy** – eligible citizens elect members of parliament to make decisions and laws on their behalf. If citizens do not think their representatives are doing a good job, they can vote for new ones at the next election.
- **Respect for and tolerance of opposing ideas** – in the Parliament issues and new laws are debated and the Australian Government is questioned about its work to make sure it is accountable to the Australian people. In society, listening to different points of view and the voices of minorities strengthens our democracy.
- **Responsible government** – to be in government, a party or coalition of parties must have the support of the majority of members in the House of Representatives. This makes sure the Australian Government is accountable to the Australian Parliament.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DEMOCRACY?

- There are ways to resolve different views and conflicts peacefully.
- Respect for human dignity.
- The freedom to act, speak and think freely (as long as it does not stop others doing the same).
- Equality before the law.
- Safe and secure community.
- Good government that is efficient, transparent, responsive and accountable to citizens.
- Ability to hold elected representatives accountable.

© Commonwealth of Australia.

Parliamentary Education Office. *Democracy*. Retrieved from <http://peo.gov.au> on 28 July 2020.

DEMOCRACY KEY IDEAS



Active and engaged citizens

Citizens have a voice and can make changes in society



An inclusive and equitable society

We work towards a society where everyone is respected and free



Free and franchised elections

We get to stand for election and choose who makes decisions on our behalf



The rule of law for both citizens and the government

Everyone is equal before the law and must follow the law

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY: AN OVERVIEW

FROM THE MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY AT OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Australia is a representative democracy. In this political system, eligible people vote for candidates to carry out the business of governing on their behalf. Australia's system of government – its institutions and practices – reflect British and North American traditions combined in a way that is uniquely Australian.

The Australian democracy has at its heart, the following core defining *values*:

- Freedom of election and being elected;
- Freedom of assembly and political participation;
- Freedom of speech, expression and religious belief;
- Rule of law; and
- Other basic human rights.

PRINCIPLES

Australian democracy has at its heart, the following core defining *principles*:

- **Responsible government:** since the government is answerable to the parliament for its actions and for those of its departments – as administered by the Public Service.
- **Ministerial responsibility:** since a minister is expected to accept full responsibility for decisions made by his or her department.
- **Rule of law:** since all Australian people (including Australian authorities) are equally required to uphold the law and are subject to legal and judicial processes.
- **Parliamentary sovereignty:** since the government is required to seek the approval of the parliament for many decisions including to create new or to amend existing law.
- **Separation of powers:** since power is distributed between the Ministry, the courts and the Parliament so as to define discrete and distinct roles and functions and such that a monopoly of power is avoided. The separation, however, is imperfect since ministers are derived from the parliament and belong to both the parliament and the Cabinet at once (this is not the case in some other democracies e.g. the USA). In addition, the prime minister chooses High Court judges.

FEATURES

Australian democracy has at its heart, the following core defining *features*:

The Australian Constitution

- The Australian Constitution is a written federal constitution that provides the basic rules for the operation of the nation laid out under three

separate titles: the Legislature (the Parliament), the Executive (Governor-General and ministers) and the Judiciary (the High Court and other courts).

- The Australian Constitution contains eight chapters and 128 sections and may be changed by referendum according to the rules set out in section 128 of the Constitution.

The Australian Federation

- Australia is a federation whereby power and authority are shared between federal and state parliaments, governments and courts. In Australia, three levels of government cooperate across many areas e.g. education, health and law enforcement and local government are involved in many others e.g. roads.
- The Australian electoral process provides for each Australian to be represented by one member and up to 12 senators in the federal Parliament. Each Australian is also represented at the state or territory level and at the local level of governance.
- Other federations include Germany, Canada and the United States of America.

Australian parliaments

There is a total of 9 parliaments across Australia. One federal (or national) parliament, located in Canberra and six state parliaments and two territory legislative assemblies, located in the capital cities of each state or territory. Representatives at each level are selected through regular and frequent popular elections. Most Australian parliaments are bicameral.

Composition of the federal parliament

The federal House of Representatives has single-member representation – a system designed to elect major parties and support efficient government; while the Senate has multi-member representation. This system elects 12 senators to each state and two to each self-governing territory. It is designed to protect the interests of the states.

Members and senators divide their time between electorate duties and parliamentary duties.

The judicature

- The judicature refers to those employed in the administration and dispensation of justice. The High Court of Australia is at the very top of the Australian judicature. It is the final court of appeal. The functions of the High Court of Australia are to interpret and apply the law of Australia; to interpret the Australian Constitution; to resolve legal disputes between Australian parliaments, Australian governments and/or the states; to decide cases of special federal significance including challenges to the constitutional validity of laws;

THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

An educational fact sheet from the Australian Electoral Commission

Australia is a representative democracy in which all Australians over 18 years vote for people to represent them, and make decisions on their behalf. There are three levels of government in Australia, and we vote to elect representatives to each of these levels: federal, state or territory and local.

Federal government

- The decision-making body of the federal government is Federal Parliament, which consists of two houses – the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- The leader of the federal government is called the Prime Minister.
- A federal election must be held every three years because Australia's Constitution limits the term of Members of the House of Representatives.
- Representatives elected to the House of Representatives are called Members of the House of Representatives. There are 151 members and each member represents a separate division or electorate in Australia.
- Representatives elected to the Senate are called senators. They represent a whole state or territory. There are 12 senators for every state and two senators for each territory. Senators representing states are elected for a term of six years, with senators representing territories elected for a term of three years.
- Federal government responsibilities include: foreign affairs, social security, industrial relations, trade, immigration, currency, defence.

State and territory government

- The decision-making body of state government is the state parliament which meets in the Parliament House of the particular state. Each state parliament, except for the Queensland Parliament, is made up of two houses.
- Representatives elected to state parliaments are generally known as 'Members' – Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHA) or Members of the Legislative Council (MLC).
- The leader of a state government is called the Premier.
- The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have a different arrangement. Each territory parliament has one house called the Legislative Assembly.
- The leader of each territory government is called the Chief Minister.
- State and territory government responsibilities include: justice, consumer affairs, health, education, forestry, public transport, main roads.

Local government

- The decision-making body of local government is usually called the city council or shire council. Councils are established by state governments to look after the particular needs of a city or local community. The people's representatives who form the Council are called aldermen or councillors. The head of the Council is the Mayor or Shire President.
- Local government responsibilities include: local road maintenance, garbage collection, building regulations and land subdivisions, public health and recreation facilities such as swimming pools.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2017.

Australian Electoral Commission. *Three levels of government*. Retrieved from <http://education.aec.gov.au> on 28 July 2020.

and to hear appeals, by special leave, from state and territory courts.

- Common law may not override an Act of Parliament; however, an Act of Parliament may override existing common law.

and formally the Australian head of state. The Governor-General represents her in Australia and is in effect the Australian head of state.

- All citizens over the age of 18 must vote in both federal and state government elections.

FACTS

Australian democracy has at its heart, the following key defining *facts*:

- The Australian nation (also known as the Commonwealth of Australia) was created in 1901 when six former British colonies – now Australia's six states – agreed to join together (federate).
- Australia operates under a Cabinet system of government, even though the Cabinet is not mentioned in the Constitution.
- HM Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of Australia

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House.
Australian democracy: an overview. Retrieved from www.moadoph.gov.au on 28 July 2020.

FEDERAL ELECTIONS

This fact sheet from the **Parliamentary Education Office** explores how federal elections are run to select people to represent Australians in the Australian Parliament. It includes information about the process of electing senators and members of the House of Representatives.

Australia is a representative democracy, which means Australians vote to elect members of parliament to make laws and decisions on their behalf. It is compulsory for Australian citizens 18 years and over to enrol to vote. It is also compulsory to attend a voting place on election day or to vote by mail.

At federal elections, Australians choose members of parliament to represent their views and interests in the Senate and the House of Representatives. In this way, the Australian Parliament serves Australians and is accountable to them.

ELECTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Section 28 of the Australian Constitution states that House of Representatives elections must be held at least every 3 years. The Prime Minister decides the date for an election. This could be at any time during the 3-year term.

There are 151 members elected to the House of Representatives – one for each of Australia's 151 electorates. There is approximately the same number of voters in each electorate.

Each member is elected using a system of preferential voting, designed to elect a single member with an absolute majority – more than half – for each electorate.

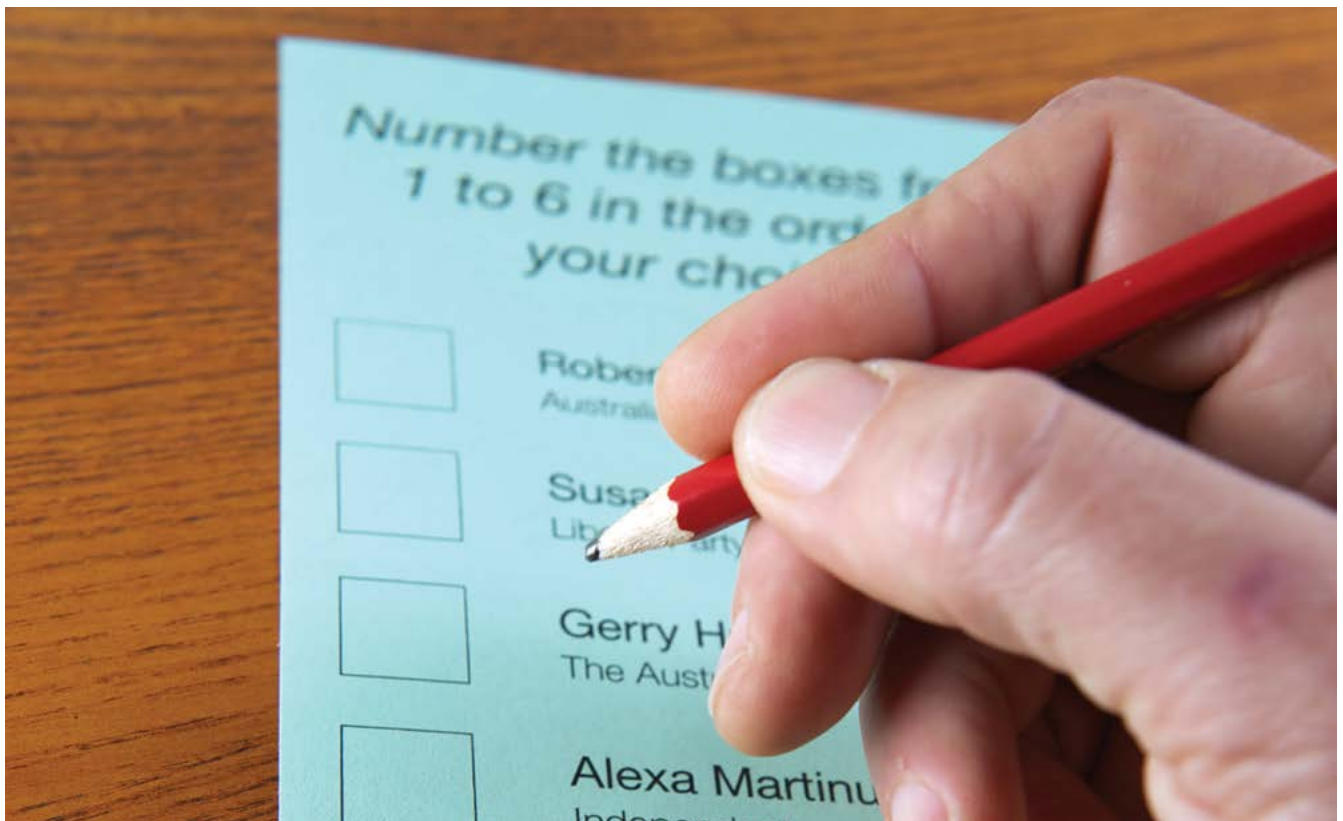
Using this system, voters write a number in the box beside every name on the ballot-paper: '1' for their first preference, '2' for their second preference and so on, until all the boxes are numbered.

If a candidate gains an absolute majority of first preference votes, they win the seat. If no candidate receives an absolute majority, the candidate with the least number of votes is excluded and their votes are redistributed according to second preferences. The process of redistributing votes according to preferences continues until one candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the vote and is then elected.

ELECTING SENATORS

Twelve senators are elected to represent each state and 2 senators are elected to represent each territory. State senators are elected for a period of 6 years using a system of rotation that ensures that only half the state senators end their term every 3 years. Territory senators are elected for a period of 3 years at the same time as the members of the House of Representatives and half of the Senate. Half-Senate elections are usually held at the same time as House of Representatives elections, though they do not have to be.

Senators are elected by a preferential voting system – proportional voting – which is designed to allocate



Electoral systems of Australia's parliaments and local governments

Australia's voting systems can be divided into three major groups, according to the **Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand**

➤ Plurality/First-Past-the-Post

The candidate who polls the highest number of formal votes – even if that number is less than 50% of the formal vote – is elected.

➤ Majoritarian/Majority

In Australia majority systems are sometimes called preferential systems. The term “preferential” refers to a voter being able to indicate an order of preference for the candidates on the ballot paper.

➤ Proportional Representation (PR)

Proportional representation systems are used for elections in multi-member electorates to elect candidates who receive a set proportion of the vote. In Australia, these systems are classified into two categories – List Systems and Single Transferable Vote (STV).

Proportional representation voting systems of Australia's parliaments

Proportional representation electoral systems are used in Australia to elect candidates to the Senate, the upper houses of NSW, Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia, the Lower House of Tasmania, the ACT Legislative Assembly and many Local Government Councils.

Preferential voting systems of Australia's parliaments

Preferential voting systems as used in Australia are majority systems where candidates must receive an absolute majority, more than 50% of the total formal votes cast, to be elected. If the absolute majority is not gained on the first count, then preferences are distributed until an absolute majority is obtained. The term “preferential voting” means voters can indicate an order of preferences for candidates on the ballot paper, i.e. who they want as their 1st choice, 2nd choice and so on.

Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ). *Electoral Systems of Australia's Parliaments and Local Governments*. Retrieved from www.ecanz.gov.au on 28 July 2020.

seats to candidates in proportion to votes cast in an election. A wider range of political parties and/or independents are often elected to the Senate.

Voters have a choice of voting above-the-line or below-the-line:

- **Above-the-line voting** requires voters to number at least 6 boxes from 1 to 6 for their chosen parties or groups. Voters' preferences are distributed in the order that the candidates in the chosen parties or groups are listed below the line. Preferences are distributed to the party or group of first choice, then second choice and so on, until all preferences are distributed.
- **Below-the-line voting** requires voters to number at least 12 boxes from 1 to 12 for their chosen individual candidates. Voters' preferences are distributed to the candidates in the order of choice, as numbered on the ballot paper.

To win a seat, a senator must gain a quota of first and later preferences. For a state senator at a half-Senate election, this equals 14.3% of the total state vote, while a territory senator must win 33.3% of the total territory vote.

The counting procedure for a Senate election is more complicated than the system used for the House of Representatives – it sometimes takes several weeks after an election to count all the Senate votes and finalise the result.

FINALISING THE RESULT

Once the election result is finalised, the successful candidates are declared and the writs are returned to the Governor-General for the House of Representatives and state governors for the Senate.

BY-ELECTIONS AND CASUAL VACANCIES

A by-election is a mini-election held for a House of Representatives electorate if a member resigns, becomes ineligible or dies between federal elections.

A casual vacancy occurs in the Senate if a senator resigns, becomes ineligible or dies between federal elections. They are replaced by a candidate from the same political party, chosen by the parliament or legislative assembly of that state/territory.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Federal elections are organised and run by the Australian Electoral Commission, who make sure that elections are free, fair and legal. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and the Australian Constitution set out the requirements for running elections.

© Commonwealth of Australia.

Parliamentary Education Office. *Federal elections*. Retrieved from <http://peo.gov.au> on 28 July 2020.

THE AUSTRALIAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

INFOSHEET REPRODUCED COURTESY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Australia is a federation of six states which, together with two self-governing territories, have their own constitutions, parliaments, governments and laws. This infosheet is about the national or central government, usually called the Federal Government, Commonwealth Government or Australian Government. However, state and territory governments are also based on the same principle of parliamentary government.

It is recommended that this infosheet be read with Infosheet No.13 *The Constitution* and Infosheet No.19 *The House, government and opposition*.

PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

The Constitution of Australia establishes the Federal Government by providing for the Parliament, the Executive Government and the Judicature (more usually called the Judiciary) – sometimes referred to as the ‘three arms of government’. However, some of the central features of Australia’s system of government (described as parliamentary, or responsible government) are not set down in the Constitution but are based on custom and convention.

Parliamentary government means that the Executive Government comes from within the Parliament; responsible government means that the Executive Government is responsible to the Parliament. This is the central feature of a Westminster-style government following the United Kingdom model – in contrast to other systems of government where the Executive is quite separate and not directly answerable to the Legislature – for example, in the United States of America.

The separation of powers

Political theory recognises three powers of government – the legislative power to make laws; the executive power to carry out and enforce the laws; and the judicial power to interpret laws and to judge whether they apply in individual cases.

The principle of the separation of powers is that, in order to prevent oppressive government, the three powers of government should be held by separate bodies – the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary – which can act as checks and balances on each other.

With parliamentary government the legislative and executive functions overlap, as the members of the Executive Government – the Ministers – are drawn from the Parliament. However, in the Australian system there are still checks and balances between the Executive and Legislature – Ministers are subject to the scrutiny of other Members of the Parliament led by an officially recognised opposition. In addition, the Executive does not necessarily control both Houses of the Parliament (see below).

Infosheet No.19 *The House, government and opposition* (www.aph.gov.au/infosheets/19) gives more

detail on the relationship between the Parliament and the Executive Government.

THE PARLIAMENT

The Constitution gives the legislative power of the Commonwealth – the power to make laws – to the Parliament. The Parliament consists of the Queen, represented by the Governor-General, and two Houses – the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Parliament passes legislation. Proposed laws have to be agreed to by both Houses of Parliament to become law. The two Houses have equal powers, except that there are restrictions on the power of the Senate to introduce or directly amend some kinds of financial legislation. Infosheet No.7 *Making laws* (www.aph.gov.au/infosheets/7) describes the parliamentary processes for the passage of legislation. The Governor-General has a role in the legislative process by assenting to Acts. See later in this infosheet for more information about the role of the Governor-General.

The Parliament also authorises the Executive Government (often simply called the government or the Executive) to spend public money by agreeing to government proposals for expenditure and taxation, scrutinises the administrative actions of the government and serves as a forum for the debate of public policy.

Another function of the Parliament under the Australian system is to provide from its membership the members of the Executive Government. After a general election the political party (or coalition of parties) with the support of a majority of members in the House of Representatives becomes the governing party and its leader becomes the Prime Minister.

The composition of the House also determines who will form the official opposition. The party (or coalition of parties) which has the most non-government Members in the House of Representatives becomes the opposition party and its leader becomes the Leader of the Opposition. The opposition has the officially recognised function, established by convention, of opposing the government. The opposition is an essential part of Australia’s democratic system of government. This subject is discussed in more detail in Infosheet No.19 *The House, government and opposition*.

While the government has, by definition, the support of a majority of Members in the House of Representatives, the system of voting used for Senate elections gives greater opportunity to minority parties and independents, and the government often does not have majority support in the Senate.

THE EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT

Constitutional provisions

The Constitution states that the executive power of the

Commonwealth is vested in the Queen and is exercisable by the Governor-General as the Queen's representative. However, a realistic understanding of Australia's Executive Government cannot be obtained from the Constitution alone, and in fact a literal reading of the Constitution can be misleading.

The Executive Government in practice

In reality, the executive power is possessed by the Prime Minister and Cabinet (senior Ministers). Their power derives:

- Constitutionally from their membership of the Federal Executive Council – see below – and status as 'advisers' to the Governor-General
- Politically, from the people at elections for the House of Representatives
- From convention – that is, custom and tradition.

Neither the Prime Minister nor the Cabinet are mentioned in the Constitution – the framers of the Constitution took their existence for granted, as they did the various conventions of the Westminster system of government inherited from the United Kingdom.

Table 1 (see page 13) gives a comparison of the constitutional provisions and the actual practice according to the conventions which have operated in Australia.

COMPOSITION OF THE MINISTRY

Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is the head of the government. They achieve this position by being the elected leader of the party in government (in the case of a coalition government, the major party).

Cabinet

The Cabinet, consisting of senior Ministers presided over by the Prime Minister, is the government's pre-eminent policy-making body. Major policy and legislative proposals are decided by the Cabinet. The Prime Minister selects Ministers for Cabinet positions.

Ministers

Ministers are selected by the Prime Minister. Legislation currently allows for up to 30 Ministers. About 20 or so senior Ministers administer the major departments and are, usually, members of Cabinet. Other Ministers are responsible for particular areas of administration within a major department, or may be in charge of a small department. Ministers are appointed from both Houses of Parliament, although most (about two thirds) are Members of the House of Representatives.

Parliamentary Secretaries

Up to 12 Members and Senators are appointed by the Prime Minister as Parliamentary Secretaries (also referred to as Assistant Ministers) to assist or represent Ministers in their administrative responsibilities.

The role of the Governor-General

The Governor-General performs the ceremonial func-



tions of head of state on behalf of the Queen. While Executive Government powers are exercised by the Governor-General or in the Governor-General's name, such actions are carried out as advised by the Prime Minister and Ministers.

Under the Constitution the Governor-General:

- Appoints and dismisses Executive Councillors
- Appoints and dismisses Ministers to administer the public service departments and agencies
- Appoints judges (the dismissal of judges can only be initiated by the Parliament)
- Is the commander in chief of the defence forces
- Decides when the Parliament meets (subject to some constitutional requirements), and may prorogue (suspend) or dissolve it
- Issues writs for general elections
- Initiates government expenditure by recommending appropriations to the Parliament
- Converts proposed laws to Acts of Parliament by assenting to legislation that has been passed by both Houses
- May block or propose amendments to any law passed by the two Houses of Parliament.

The Governor-General also has executive powers under many Acts of Parliament – for example, the power to proclaim legislation (that is, bring it into effect) and to make regulations and other kinds of delegated legislation (that is, legislative powers that the Parliament has delegated to the Executive Government). Most of the executive actions taken by the Governor-General are of this kind.

In practice, except when reserve powers are involved – see below – these functions are exercised as advised by the Prime Minister and Ministers.

The Governor-General's reserve powers

In some matters the Constitution gives the Governor-General powers to act independently. These include the power to dissolve the House of Representatives and, in certain situations, both Houses (see Infosheet No.18

Double dissolution (www.aph.gov.au/infosheets/18). However, in other than exceptional circumstances, the Governor-General will follow the advice of a Prime Minister who retains the confidence of the House.

The powers that the Governor-General has to act without advice are referred to as 'prerogative' or 'reserve' powers and are not clearly defined in the Constitution. Constitutional experts do not agree on their precise extent or on the nature of the exceptional circumstances in which they may be exercised.

The Federal Executive Council

The Federal Executive Council is the constitutional mechanism for providing ministerial advice to the Governor-General. It is not a forum for policy debate or deliberation and its proceedings are entirely formal.

All Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries become members of the Executive Council. They receive the title 'Honourable'. The Council's full membership never meets. In practice the minimum number of Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries (that is, two in addition to the person presiding) are rostered to attend. Meetings of the Council are presided over by the Governor-General or a deputy appointed by the Governor-General (usually the Minister with the title Vice President of the Executive Council). The matters dealt with at each meeting are recommendations by Ministers, for the approval of the Governor-General in Council, that something be done – for example, that a regulation be made, a treaty be ratified, or a person be appointed to a position.

While the Executive Council may seem no more than a rubber stamp, the processes involved in bringing matters before the Council ensure that Ministers'

actions are properly documented, are legally and constitutionally valid, and are in accordance with government policy.

The role of the Queen

Australia is a constitutional monarchy. A monarchy is a country where the position of head of state is inherited. A constitutional monarchy is one where the powers of the monarch or sovereign – the King or Queen – are limited by law or convention, and generally exercised only according to the advice of an elected government.

The head of state is a formal, symbolic and ceremonial position, as opposed to the position of head of government, which has the administrative power to govern the country. In some systems of government the head of state and head of government are the same person – for example, in the United States the President has both functions.

Australia's head of state is Queen Elizabeth II. Queen Elizabeth is also Queen of the United Kingdom and several other countries which used to be part of the former British Empire. The Queen's role as Queen of Australia is quite separate from her role as Queen of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom Government plays no part in the Queen's role as Queen of Australia.

In Australia the powers of the Queen have been delegated by the Australian Constitution to her representative in Australia, the Governor-General. That is, while Australia's head of state is the Queen, the functions of head of state are performed by the Governor-General.

The Queen's only necessary constitutional function is to appoint the Governor-General, and in doing this the Queen acts as advised by the Australian Prime Minister. The Constitution gives the Queen the power to disallow an Australian Act of Parliament, but this has never been done and it is extremely unlikely that it would ever be done.

THE JUDICIARY

The Constitution vests the judicial power of the Commonwealth – the power to interpret laws and to judge whether they apply in individual cases – in the High Court and other federal courts. The High Court is established by the Constitution. Other federal courts are created by legislation of the Parliament. Judges are appointed by the Governor-General acting on the advice of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Judges can only be removed from office by the Governor-General following a request for the removal from both Houses of Parliament on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

One of the major functions of the High Court is to interpret the Constitution. The High Court may rule a law to be unconstitutional – that is, beyond the power of the Parliament to make – and therefore of no effect. While the Parliament may override a court's interpretation of any ordinary law by passing or amending an Act of Parliament, the Parliament is subject to the Constitution. The Constitution cannot be changed by an Act of Parliament alone – a referendum of the people is necessary.



TABLE 1 – THE EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

| | How achieved | Formal appointment pursuant to Constitution | Constitutional functions | Conventions applying/ functions in practice |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Sovereign | Inherited. | | Head of Executive Government and one of constituent parts of the Parliament, but these functions are delegated to the Governor-General. Appoints the Governor-General. May disallow an Act of Parliament (but this has never been done). | Head of State. Only necessary personal function is to appoint the Governor-General. May on occasion perform acts normally carried out by the Governor-General, such as opening a session of Parliament or assenting to an Act of Parliament. Acts as advised by the Prime Minister. |
| Governor-General | Selected by the Prime Minister. | By the Sovereign, as her representative in Australia. | Represents the Queen as head of Executive Government and one of constituent parts of the Parliament. In most matters must act as advised by the Federal Executive Council. | Performs functions of Head of State. Normally in all matters acts as advised by the Prime Minister and Ministers. Has reserve powers to act independently in emergencies. The extent of these and way they should be exercised are not agreed on. |
| Prime Minister | Leader of the party which has the support of the most Members of the House of Representatives. Is elected leader through internal party processes. | By the Governor-General as a Minister of State. By the Governor-General as a member of the Federal Executive Council. | As for Ministers. The position of Prime Minister is not recognised by the Constitution. | The Governor-General commissions the leader of the party (or coalition) with the largest number of Members of the House of Representatives to form a Government. The Prime Minister chairs Cabinet and is in practice the Head of the Executive Government. |
| Ministers | Selected by the Prime Minister from Members of the House of Representatives and Senators from the party or coalition of parties in government. The Prime Minister's selection may be constrained by internal party processes. | By the Governor-General as Ministers of State. By the Governor-General as members of the Federal Executive Council. (Ministers must be appointed to the Federal Executive Council and must be Members of the House of Representatives or Senators, or become so within three months of appointment). | As Ministers, to administer Departments of State. As Executive Councillors, to advise the Governor-General. The Cabinet is not recognised by the Constitution. | Senior Ministers are in charge of larger or more important departments, and are normally members of the Cabinet. Junior Ministers may be in charge of a small department, or assist another Minister in the administration of a larger department. The Cabinet is, in practice, the heart of the Executive Government. All major policy and legislative proposals are decided by the Cabinet. |
| Parliamentary Secretaries (also referred to as Assistant Ministers) | As for Ministers. | As for Ministers (Parliamentary Secretaries are a class of Ministers designated as Parliamentary Secretaries). | As for Ministers. | Parliamentary Secretaries assist Ministers in the administration of their departments. |
| Executive Councillors | As for Ministers. | By the Governor-General (there is no constitutional restriction on who should be appointed). | To advise the Governor-General. | Only Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are appointed (generally for life). Only Executive Councillors who are members of the current Government advise the Governor-General. |

Parliament of Australia, The Department of the House of Representatives.
Infosheet No.20 – The Australian system of government. Retrieved from www.aph.gov.au on 28 July 2020.

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between
 THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

CHAPTER 2

Trust and satisfaction in democracy

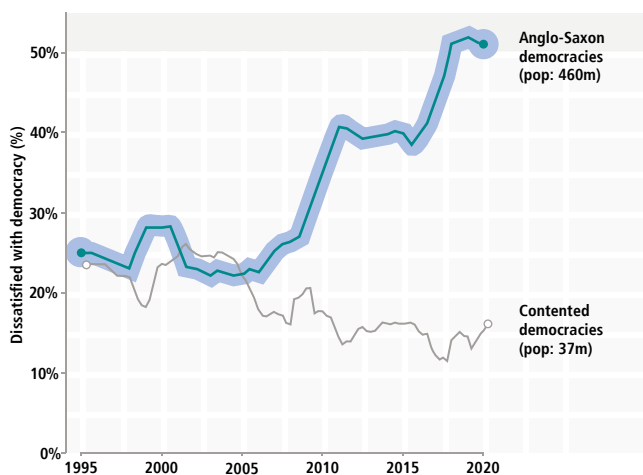
WHERE PEOPLE ARE SATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY AND WHY

Global dissatisfaction with democracy has increased over the past 25 years, according to a recent report by **Roberto Foa** and **Andrew James Klassen**

Drawing upon the HUMAN Surveys project, the report covered 154 countries, with 77 countries covered continuously for the period from 1995 to 2020. These samples were possible thanks to the combination of data from over 25 sources, 3,500 national surveys, and 4 million respondents.

Not surprisingly, the gloomy headline finding – rising democratic dissatisfaction – attracted the most attention. Less widely discussed, however, is the “good news” – that a small sample of countries has bucked the trend, and have record high levels of satisfaction with their democracies.

ISLANDS OF CONTENTMENT



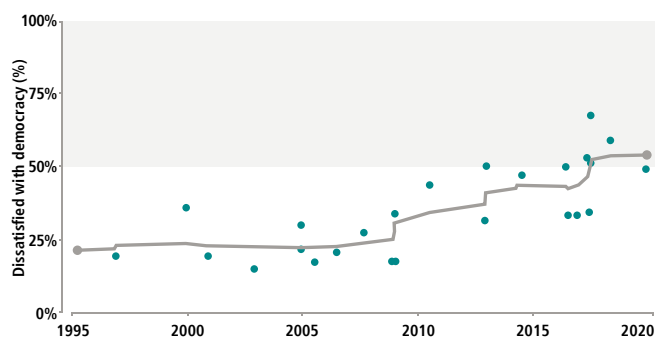
Contented nations are Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg and Switzerland; the Anglo-Saxon democracies are the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The thickness of lines is relative to population in each grouping.

Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand and Collins (2020). *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

Why are such countries – the Netherlands, Denmark, or Switzerland – able to achieve high and rising levels of democratic contentment?

There are four factors that stand out in explaining why some democracies have – or have not – experienced an eroding democratic satisfaction. These can be summarised by four “Ps”: polarisation, paralysis, perfidy (or scandal), and powerlessness.

UNITED STATES



United States: growing dissatisfaction.

Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand and Collins (2020). *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

POLARISATION

First, countries with increasing polarisation show rising dissatisfaction. This is especially the case in majoritarian electoral systems that generate “winners and losers”, leaving close to half of the electorate dissatisfied following every election.

In Australia, the revolving door of prime ministers between 2013 and 2018 has left many voters dissatisfied.

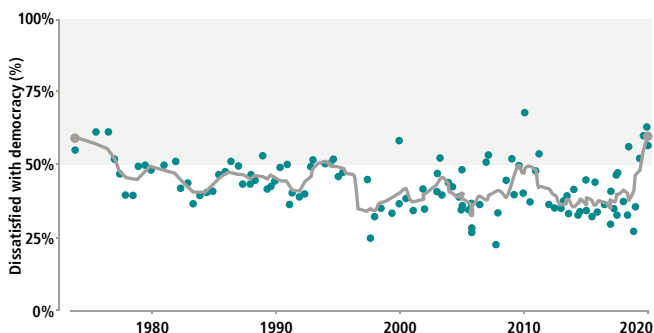
Recent research shows that the US has had the largest increase in polarisation since the 1990s, and it is also among the countries with the largest increase in democratic dissatisfaction. Other majoritarian democracies, such as Canada and the UK, have suffered the same trend, though, on a more limited scale.

The countries such as Denmark or Switzerland, which we call the “islands of contentment”, on the other hand, have limited polarisation and use proportional representation. The political structures of these nations drive them towards more cooperative forms of politics, and they are often less complicated to govern.

PARALYSIS

Citizens abhor a political vacuum. Perhaps one of the clearest examples is the UK during the Brexit

UNITED KINGDOM



United Kingdom: paralysed over Brexit.

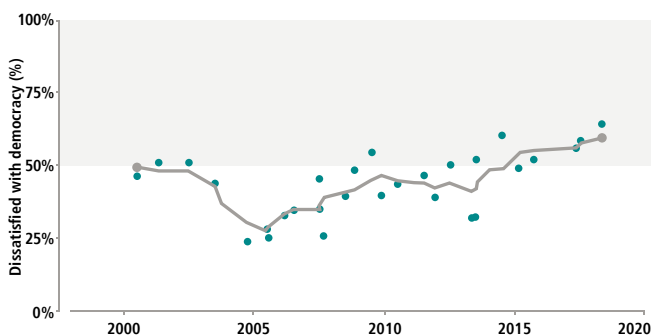
Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand and Collins (2020). *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

paralysis of 2019, in which the British cabinet and parliament were logjammed over whether to pass the EU withdrawal agreement, hold a second referendum, or call an election.

The UK is not the only example: government shut-downs in the US under Bill Clinton in 1995-6, Barack Obama in 2013, and Donald Trump in 2018-9 did not increase public satisfaction. And in Australia, the revolving door of prime ministers between 2013 and 2018 has left many voters dissatisfied.

On the other hand, in countries where there is relative continuity in government, such crises are avoided. In Switzerland, the so-called “magic formula” coalition at the federal level almost prevents such crises by design and satisfaction has been rising.

SOUTH AFRICA



South Africa: the Zuma years did little for satisfaction in democracy.

Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand and Collins (2020). *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

PERFIDY

Perfidy – or, corruption and scandal – is one of the strongest predictors of dissatisfaction with democracy. These can be short-lived, as with the UK parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009, which saw dissatisfaction temporarily spike, or rather longer in duration, such as the “tangentpoli” investigations in 1990s Italy which led to the collapse of the entire party system.

Inevitably, more extreme examples can be found in many emerging democracies. In Brazil, democratic dissatisfaction has soared since the start of the “Lava Jato” investigations in 2014. And in South Africa, a string of corruption revelations during the presidency of Jacob Zuma sent democratic dissatisfaction soaring to record highs.

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg on the other hand are the first, fourth, eighth, and ninth least corrupt countries in the world, respectively, according to Transparency International.

POWERLESSNESS

Finally, citizens must feel that they have agency over the political process. A clear example of powerlessness is where there is low electoral integrity. Elections are one of the most visible aspects of democracy, and unfair electoral practices decrease public satisfaction.

On the other hand, in countries where there is relative continuity in government, such crises are avoided.

The unlimited money pouring into US elections since 2010, its demonstrably gerrymandered electoral districts, active voter suppression, and controversies in vote counting have left many disillusioned with the electoral process. Canada is better off, but the circumvention of election finance rules by Conservatives in the 2006 election campaign and Robocall scandal in the 2011 Canadian federal elections did not enhance public satisfaction.

By comparison, the Electoral Integrity Project run by Harvard and Sydney universities, gives Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg some of the best scores in the world.

Feelings of political agency require a sense of influence over domestic institutions, but also a sense that those institutions are in themselves sovereign. A number of the most satisfied nations in our study are either on the outskirts of the EU (Norway and Switzerland), or not in the eurozone (Denmark), projects that require substantial pooling of sovereignty in order to function.

Meanwhile, countries in southern Europe such as Greece, caught in the eurozone crisis, have experienced a profound breakdown in democratic satisfaction in recent years.

Bolstering satisfaction in democracy will require addressing multiple issues. But acknowledging that democratic discontent has deeper roots is a necessary starting point.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and have disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Roberto Foa is Lecturer in Politics and Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

Andrew James Klassen is Affiliated Researcher, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge.

THE CONVERSATION

Foa, R, and Klassen, AJ (12 February 2020). *Where people are satisfied with democracy and why*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

REBUILDING CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT IS A PREREQUISITE FOR ECONOMIC REFORM, OBSERVES ADAM TRIGGS IN THIS ARTICLE FROM **INSIDE STORY**

Unbearable,” “crippling” and “exorbitant” were the words used to describe Australia’s “debt and deficit crisis” back when net debt was 12.5 per cent of GDP. How quickly times have changed.

The same people, now in government, last week described Australia’s forecast net debt of 35.7 per cent of GDP, three times bigger, as “manageable.” This change of mind took place in a week when federal and state governments were scratching their heads wondering why the public weren’t listening to government advice about COVID-19. Why indeed.

Trust in government is vital. Without trust, markets fail. Reform is near impossible. Economic growth is weaker, investment stalls, consumption flatlines, the tax system fails. Critical institutions ranging from the police and the courts to the Reserve Bank and the tax office can’t do their job. It took a pandemic to reveal just how big the cost of mistrust in government can be.

When the public don’t listen to the health advice coming from their governments, the virus spreads, people die.

But why should they listen? Many of those in government who have pleaded with the public to heed scientific advice on COVID-19 have been the same people who told us that scientists are corrupt and untrustworthy on climate change. The people who warned us about the inherent incompetence of government and the inherent dangers of big government are now telling us that the biggest government in Australian postwar history is a good thing.

When the public don’t listen to the health advice coming from their governments, the virus spreads, people die.

The consequences of these past short-sighted political wins have come home to roost. The result of historically low trust in government and institutions is on display for all to see.

The Edelman global trust survey asked Australians to rank government, business, the media and non-government organisations by how competent and ethical they were. None were found to be both. According to those surveyed, businesses are competent but unethical. NGOs are ethical but not competent. And the government and the media? Neither competent nor ethical. Forty-five per cent of Australians distrust these institutions. Only 12 per cent of Australians believe the government is run for “all the people,” according to Essential Research.

Nor is distrust limited to government and media. Revelations from royal commissions have shaken trust in the financial system, trade unions and the institutions charged with protecting our children. The Black Lives Matter movement has shone a spotlight on the deep systemic failings of our police and legal system. The scourge of tax avoidance among multinationals, the rich and big companies has undermined trust in our tax system, while rising wage theft and depressed wages feed the narrative of a system rigged against workers.

Political scandals involving Bridget McKenzie, Sam Dastyari, Pauline Hanson, Stuart Robert, Eddie Obeid, Ian Macdonald – too many to mention from all sides of politics – have shaken confidence in our political system. The private sector does little better. In the context of COVID-19, a third or more of Australians believe that cruise liners, big banks and insurance companies will “always act in their own interests, even if it endangers people or is detrimental to the public.”

Luckily, the news is not all bad. There is some evidence that COVID-19 has marginally increased the



There is plenty of low-hanging fruit. Establishing a national anti-corruption authority and reforming political donations are no-brainers. Criminalising wage theft across Australia would boost confidence in our labour markets. Closing generous tax loopholes exploited by the rich would boost confidence in our tax system. Harsher criminal penalties for financial wrongdoers would boost confidence in our financial system. Disqualifying company directors who engage in anti-competitive conduct or who persistently mislead consumers – with financial penalties that are more than a mere cost of doing business – would boost confidence in our product markets. And stop cutting the ABC's budget: the public have more trust in that institution than in our legal system, police, businesses, charities and every parliament and political party in the country.

The Australian economy is in desperate need of reform, but the government cannot implement reform without trust. COVID-19 has produced a rare uptick in public trust. Whether the government develops it or dashes it remains to be seen.

We need to pick the low-hanging fruit because the other sources of distrust – rising inequality and diversified flows of information, social networks and technology – are much harder to solve in the short term.

The statistics show the scale of the challenge. Thirteen per cent of Australians believe Bill Gates played a role in the creation of COVID-19. Thirteen per cent believe that COVID-19 is not dangerous and is being used to force people to get vaccines. Twelve per cent believe that the 5G wireless network is being used to spread the virus. Twenty per cent of Australians believe that the media and government are artificially increasing the number of people reported to have died from COVID-19 in order to scare the public. Google searches



for “is the world flat” have tripled in the last three years.

The Australian economy is in desperate need of reform, but the government cannot implement reform without trust. COVID-19 has produced a rare uptick in public trust. Whether the government develops it or dashes it remains to be seen.

Adam Triggs is Director of Research at the Asian Bureau of Economic Research at ANU and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Triggs, A (27 July 2020). *Who do you trust?*
Retrieved from <http://insidestory.org.au> on 29 July 2020.

Australians highly confident of government's handling of coronavirus and economic recovery: new research

Australians have exhibited high levels of trust in federal government during the coronavirus pandemic, a marked shift from most people's views of government before the crisis began, new research shows. By **Mark Evans**

Australians are also putting their trust in government at far higher rates than people in three other countries badly affected by the virus – the US, Italy and the UK. The findings, published today in a new report, *Is Australia still the lucky country?*, are part of a broader comparative research collaboration between the Democracy 2025 initiative at the Museum of Australian Democracy and the TrustGov Project at the University of Southampton in the UK.

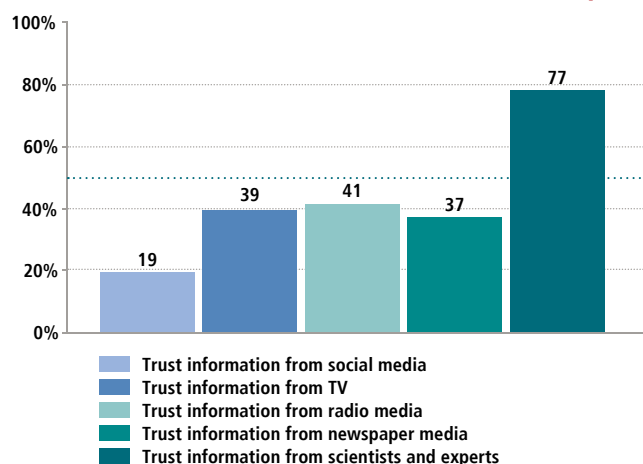
The research involved surveys of adults aged between 18 and 75 in all four countries in June to gauge whether public attitudes toward democratic institutions and practices had changed during the pandemic. We also asked about people's compliance with coronavirus restrictions and their resilience to meet the challenge of the post-pandemic recovery.

The main proposition behind our research is that public trust is critical in times like this. Without it, the changes to public behaviour necessary to contain the spread of infection are slower and more resource-intensive.

| CONFIDENCE IN KEY INSTITUTIONS | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----------|---------|
| | Italy | UK | US | Australia | Average |
| Government | 40 | 41 | 34 | 54 | 42 |
| Parliament | 24 | 39 | 26 | 7 | 30 |
| Political parties | 9 | 18 | 13 | 25 | 16 |
| Health service | 75 | 85 | 48 | 77 | 71 |
| WHO | 59 | 67 | 59 | 54 | 60 |
| EU | 38 | 41 | 46 | n/a | 41 |
| Army | 74 | 82 | 84 | 78 | 80 |
| Press | 33 | 18 | 36 | 32 | 30 |
| TV | 28 | 47 | 35 | 36 | 37 |
| Courts | 45 | 61 | 53 | 55 | 53 |
| Police | 77 | 70 | 71 | 75 | 73 |
| Civil service | 32 | 57 | 64 | 54 | 51 |
| Universities | 76 | 73 | 64 | 61 | 69 |
| Cultural institutions | n/a | n/a | n/a | 70 | 70 |

Percentage who say they have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence. (Note: the survey collect data on the Australian parliament as it didn't convene during the period of data collection.) Democracy 2025/TrustGov survey.

Public trust in various media, scientists and experts



LEVELS OF TRUST HIGHER FOR MOST INSTITUTIONS

Australians are now exhibiting much higher levels of political trust in federal government (from 25% in 2019 to 54% in our survey), and the Australian public service (from 38% in 2018 to 54% in our survey).

Compared to the other three countries in our research, Australia's trust in government also comes out on top. In the UK, only 41% of participants had high trust in government, while in Italy it was at 40% and the US just 34%.

Australians also have high levels of confidence in institutions related to defence and law and order, such as the army (78%), police (75%) and the courts (55%). Levels of trust are also high in the health services (77%), cultural institutions (70%) and universities (61%). Notably, Australians exhibit high levels of trust in scientists and experts (77%).

These figures were comparable with the other countries in the survey, with the notable exception of Americans' confidence in the health services, which stood at just 48%.

Although Australians continue to have low levels of trust in social media (from 20% in 2018 to 19% in our survey), confidence is gaining in other forms of news dissemination, such as TV (from 32% in 2018 to 39%), radio (from 38% in 2018 to 41%) and newspapers (from 29% in 2018 to 37%).

HOW DOES MORRISON COMPARE WITH TRUMP AND OTHER LEADERS?

Prime Minister Scott Morrison is perceived to be performing strongly in his management of the crisis by a

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

| | UK (Johnson) | US (Trump) | Italy (Conte) | Australia (Morrison) | Average |
|---|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Listens to experts in how to handle the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak | 56 | 33 | 67 | 73 | 57 |
| Listens to other politicians from government party/parties | 51 | 41 | 49 | 57 | 49 |
| Listens to politicians from opposition parties | 23 | 16 | 26 | 36 | 25 |
| Cares about people like me | 33 | 34 | 37 | 46 | 37 |
| Is handling the coronavirus situation well | 37 | 35 | 52 | 69 | 48 |
| Is handling the coronavirus outbreak competently and efficiently | 37 | 36 | 51 | 67 | 48 |
| Is handling the coronavirus outbreak poorly | 47 | 55 | 29 | 20 | 38 |
| Usually acts in his own interests in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak | 40 | 59 | 21 | 32 | 38 |
| Wants to do his best to serve the country in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak | 58 | 44 | 62 | 70 | 58 |
| Is generally free of corruption in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak | 46 | 33 | 49 | 57 | 46 |
| Is open and transparent in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak | 36 | 36 | 50 | 57 | 45 |

Percentage of respondents in four countries who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with statements about how their leader is handling COVID-19. Democracy 2025/TrustGov survey.

significant majority of Australians (69%).

Indeed, he possesses the strongest performance measures in comparison with Italy (52% had high confidence in Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte), the UK (37% for Prime Minister Boris Johnson) and the US (35% for President Donald Trump).

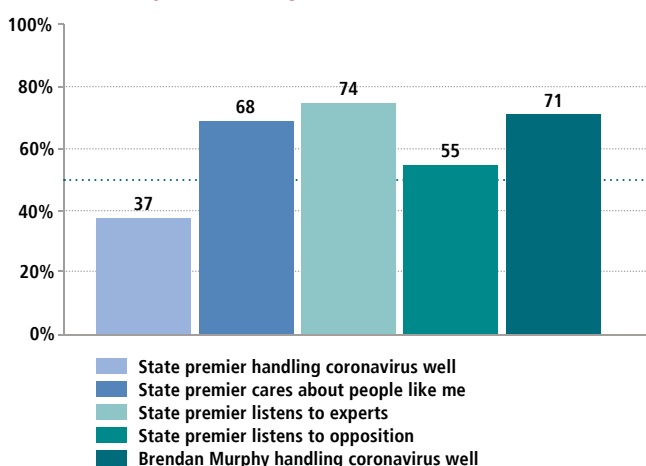
Morrison also scores highly when it comes to listening to experts, with 73% of Australians saying he does, compared to just 33% of Americans believing Trump does.

Interestingly, Morrison's approval numbers are also far higher than the state premiers in Australia. Only 37% of our respondents on average think their

state premier or chief minister is "handling the coronavirus situation well". Tasmanians (52%) and Western Australians (49%) had the highest confidence in their leaders' handling of the crisis.

This suggests that in Australia, the politics of national

Perceptions of the quality of state and territory leadership



PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEVEL OF THREAT POSED BY COVID-19

| | Italy | UK | US | Australia | Total |
|---|-------|----|----|-----------|-------|
| The coronavirus will have financial impact on you and your family | 63 | 61 | 63 | 60 | 62 |
| COVID-19 poses a threat to your country | 64 | 68 | 61 | 33 | 57 |
| COVID-19 poses a threat to you personally | 28 | 33 | 28 | 19 | 27 |
| COVID-19 pose a threat to your job or business | 41 | 40 | 33 | 28 | 36 |

Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statements about the economic threat posed by coronavirus. Democracy 2025/TrustGov survey.

unity (the “rally around the flag” phenomenon) is strong in times of crisis, whereas people tend to view the leaders of states or territories as acting in their own self-interest.

COMPLIANCE AND RESILIENCE

Our findings also showed most Australians were complying with the key government measures to combat COVID-19, but were marginally less compliant than their counterparts in the UK. (Australians are relatively equal with Italians and Americans.)

Among the states and territories, Victorians have been the most compliant with anti-COVID-19 measures, while the ACT, Tasmania and the Northern Territory were the least compliant. This is in line with the low levels of reported cases in these jurisdictions and by the lower public perception of the risk of infection.

When it comes to resilience to meet the challenges of the post-pandemic recovery, we considered confidence in social, economic and political factors.

Although a majority of Australians (60%) expect COVID-19 to have a “high” or “very high” level of financial threat for them and their families, they are less worried than their counterparts in Italy, the UK and US about the threat COVID-19 poses “to the country” (33%), “to them personally” (19%), or “to their job or business” (29%).

About half of all Australians believe the economy will get worse in the next year (this is slightly higher than in the US but much lower than in the UK and Italy). In Australia, women, young people, Labor voters and those on lower incomes with lower levels

of qualifications are the most pessimistic on all confidence measures. However, Australians remain highly confident the country will bounce back from COVID-19, with most believing Australia is “more resilient than most other countries” (72%).

We also assessed whether views about how democracy works should change as a result of the pandemic. An overwhelming majority of people said they wanted politicians to be more honest and fair (87%), be more decisive but accountable for their actions (82%) and be more collaborative and less adversarial (82%).

STAYING LUCKY

Australia has been lucky in terms of its relative geographical isolation from international air passenger traffic during the pandemic. But Australia has also benefited from effective governance – facilitated by strong political bipartisanship from Labor – and by atypical coordination of state and federal governments via the National Cabinet. The big question now is whether Morrison can sustain strong levels of public trust in the recovery period.

There are two positive lessons to be drawn from the government’s management of COVID-19 in this regard. First, the Australian people expects their governments to continue to listen to the experts, as reflected in the high regard that Australians have for evidence-based decision-making observed in the survey. Second, the focus on collaboration and bipartisanship has played well with an Australian public fed up with adversarial politics.

The critical insight then is clear: Australia needs to embrace this new style of politics – one that is cleaner, collaborative and evidence-based – to drive post-COVID-19 recovery and remain a lucky country.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

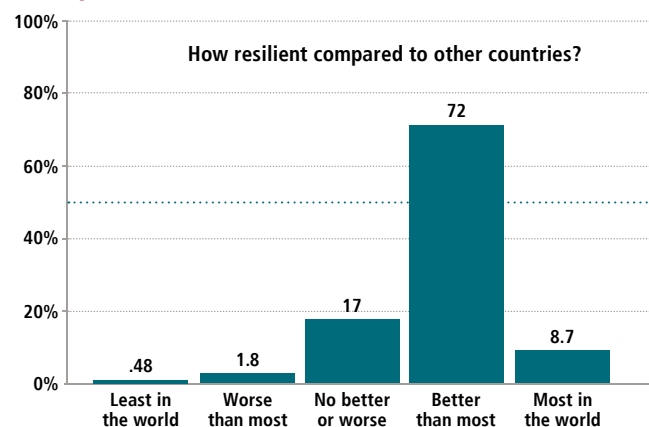
Mark Evans presently receives funding from the Commonwealth Department of Social Services for research on performance outcomes.

Mark Evans is Professor of Governance and Director of Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide at Old Parliament House, University of Canberra.

THE CONVERSATION

Evans, M (20 July 2020). *Australians highly confident of government’s handling of coronavirus and economic recovery: new research*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

Perceptions of Australian resilience



Perceptions of Australian resilience compared to other countries. Democracy 2025/TrustGov survey.

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

Democracy in Australia

Issues in Society | Volume 464

THE HEALTH OF OUR DEMOCRACY ALSO NEEDS PROTECTING IN A CRISIS

As Australia and the rest of the world deal with the deadly outbreak of COVID-19 and its economic fallout, many countries, regions and cities have declared a state of emergency. This has granted authorities extraordinary powers to try to prevent the spread of the virus. But at what cost to our democracy, asks Serena Lillywhite, CEO of **Transparency International Australia**

CCOVID-19 infections have been growing at an exponential rate, and more than a million Australians have joined the jobless queue. States of emergency have been declared and extraordinary powers authorised to speed up decision-making and allocate resources. This is important and often necessary to deal with a crisis, but we have a right to be alarmed at the curtailment of accountability and transparency.

Worrying trends

Disruption, uncertainty and distraction contribute to an environment in which corrupt actors can take advantage of the crisis for their own benefit. Decisions can be influenced, contracts and licences granted, purchases made outside of procurement guidelines, and tenders secured without the same level of scrutiny and due diligence that may normally apply.

We need to be alert to the granting of special powers to senior politicians that could damage our democracy long term. It's never easy to wind back powers once granted. The concentration of power should not, under any circumstances, lead to its abuse. And special powers in response to the pandemic must only be used for the

purposes for which they were granted.

In Australia, as elsewhere, our civil liberties are being curtailed and new police powers are being introduced. This may be necessary at this point in time, but it needs to be monitored. The New South Wales government has introduced a fine of up to \$11,000 for breaching lockdown restrictions and prison for up to 6 months. Meanwhile, for potentially the next five months there will be little federal parliamentary oversight, questions and review as billions of dollars flow into various stimulus packages.

We need to be alert to the granting of special powers to senior politicians that could damage our democracy long term. It's never easy to wind back powers once granted. The concentration of power should not, under any circumstances, lead to its abuse.

It's a story playing out around the world. In Hungary, a decree has been passed giving the prime minister unlimited powers sparking fears of a clampdown on human rights. In Israel temporary laws were passed overnight, and bypassing parliament to enable security agents to access the phones of suspected coronavirus sufferers. In Serbia, procurement rules are being tossed aside. Clearly at a time like this emergency powers are needed, but they must have a clear deadline and limited in scope.

The Council of Europe has stated: it's essential to



protect the rule of law, parliamentary oversight, independent judicial control and effective domestic remedies, even during an emergency.

Transparency and accountability needs a booster shot

At times like this, transparency in government decision-making is essential to counteract the risk of abuses of power when many oversight and accountability processes have been disrupted, regulators are distracted, and the public is looking the other way.

Transparency, openness and integrity must not only be maintained but ramped up. Safeguards against corruption and misconduct must never be weakened or disregarded, otherwise decisions are made that are not in the public interest.

Corporate fire sale

Of course, we don't want to slow down the response to the crisis, but we need to be alert to the risks of undue influence and lobbying by special interest groups who may jostle to be first in line for public bailouts, or self-dealing government officials who make decisions to benefit friends and family. We need tough safeguards that will protect against self-interested parties taking advantage of this emergency for their own benefit. For example, in the US allegations of insider trading have been made against lawmakers who received confidential COVID-19 briefings and then cashed in their stocks just before the market tanked.

If we accept the crisis as a reason to reject transparency and accountability, it will inevitably lead to corruption. Australia has just announced changes to the foreign investment review framework which will require all foreign investment proposals to be assessed by its Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) during the duration of the coronavirus crisis to prevent a fire sale of distressed corporate assets.

This sounds good, but in reality these restrictions can be easily side-stepped because Australia's anti-money laundering and counterterrorism laws (AML/CTF) are weak and don't apply to the accountants, lawyers and real estate agents – those who enable the sales to happen.

Combined with the lack of beneficial ownership checks, the ease of making a company appear to be Australian-owned, gaping holes in the ASIC corporate register, and ASIC's inability to conduct due diligence on their own register, understanding if it is really a foreign investment is unlikely and Australia's property market will keep its doors wide open for money laundering.

The trust factor

The announcement of three coronavirus stimulus and wage support packages worth a combined \$214 billion has been almost universally welcomed. What is worrying though is the granting of new powers to ministers, and a cranking up of spending authority. For example, the government's annual discretionary fund of \$1.2

billion under the control of Finance Minister Cormann for unforeseen expenses was increased to \$40 billion without any other approvals required.

Again, that may be OK in the circumstances, but with parliament suspended and reportedly not meeting again until August 2020, what confidence can the public have that the necessary checks and balances are in place? Can the public be confident that spending will occur based on need and without political bias or undue influence?

Trust and confidence in government has been steadily declining for years, reaching record lows before the COVID-19 crisis. It's not surprising why – undue influence, lobbying, dodgy deals, sports rorts, and corruption have dominated the front pages of our press. Trust in our leaders is more important than ever in an emergency. Trust is what compels us to follow the government's urgent advice, and it gives us hope that we can emerge out of this crisis. When trust is lost, it cannot easily be regained, even in times of a pandemic.

To earn our trust, governments must provide a solid explanation for the choices they make; they need to govern with transparency and accountability, and they need to act with integrity, always.

The media and civil society play a critical role in providing the public with reliable, independent and up-to-date information during times of crisis. They can also shine a light on the unscrupulous conduct of self-interested players, that inevitably rise to the top, and given the opportunity, will take advantage of a crisis for their personal gain. The voices of the media, investigative journalism and civil society must be protected, and emergency powers must never be used to stifle freedom of the press.

Is this a tipping point?

What world will we step into? In the coming months political decision-making must be as open, transparent and as evidenced-based as possible.

Already there are suggestions of coal mine expansion in Australia 'being even more important' to create jobs and bounce back – but at what bigger cost?

For sure extensive consultation and participatory decision-making is not easy in a time of crisis but protecting and strengthening our democracy is a precious ball that can't be dropped.

This state of emergency should not be taken as an opportunity to bypass transparency and accountability. Access to information is key so that there can be accountability in the future for the decisions made now.

Serena Lillywhite is the CEO of Transparency International Australia. Serena is an experienced corporate accountability practitioner, researcher and advocate, with an extensive career in responsible business conduct. Her expertise includes governance, corruption, human rights, labour rights and land and resettlement issues. She has worked across the financial services, mining and garment and apparel sectors.

Transparency International Australia (2 April 2020).
The health of our democracy also needs protecting in a crisis.
Retrieved from <http://transparency.org.au> on 28 July 2020.

Trust in government hits all-time low

Trust in government has reached its lowest level on record, with just one-in-four Australians saying they had confidence in their political leaders and institutions, according to a major study of the 2019 federal election. The latest Australian Election Study, conducted by the **Australian National University**, also found Australians' satisfaction with democracy is at its lowest since the constitutional crisis of the 1970s.

Just 59 per cent of Australians are satisfied with how democracy is working – down 27 percentage points from the record high of 86 per cent in 2007. The historic low sits at 56 per cent in 1979.

“I’ve been studying elections for 40 years, and never have I seen such poor returns for public trust in and satisfaction with democratic institutions,” lead researcher Professor McAllister said.

“There is widespread public concern about how our democracy is underperforming.”

Professor McAllister added that the findings were a clear warning the nation’s politicians needed to do better in their efforts to represent and win the confidence of everyday Australians.

“Trust in our politicians has been on a steady downward trend since 2007, when it sat at 43 per cent,” he said.

“In one of the most worrying findings from our study, a little over one-in-10 Australians, 12 per cent, believe the government is run for ‘all the people’.

“In contrast more than half, 56 per cent, say government is run for a ‘few big interests’.

“This is a wake-up call.

“With faith in democracy taking major hits all over the globe, winning back the people’s trust and satisfaction would appear to be one of the most pressing and urgent challenges facing our political leaders and institutions.”

Analysing every major federal poll since 1987, the latest Australian Election Study also helps explain the shock 2019 result. The study found the Coalition had a strong advantage when it came to voters’ perceptions on who could manage the economy, while Labor had the advantage on environmental issues.

“Voters swung to the Coalition based on the economy, tax and leadership. Voters swung to Labor on the environment,” said Dr Jill Sheppard who worked on this year’s study.

“What the study shows is that a key concern for voters was the economy. And this is what tipped the balance in favour of the Coalition.”

Another factor explaining the 2019 election result is that fewer Australians align with the major political parties.

“The study shows a clear rise in support for minor parties among voters, while 21 per cent of Australians don’t align with any party at all,” Dr Sheppard said.

When it came to captains who make the calls, the



“There is widespread public concern about how our democracy is underperforming.”

study found Scott Morrison was the most popular political leader since Kevin Rudd in 2007. He scored 5.1 on a popularity scale of zero to 10.

In contrast, Bill Shorten was the least popular leader of any major political party since 1990.

“Leaders have always played a major role in shaping voters’ choices and the 2019 election was no exception,” said Dr Sarah Cameron from the University of Sydney and study co-lead author.

“But, the role of leadership in the 2019 election was different from other elections in two respects. First, Bill Shorten’s historically low popularity undoubtedly disadvantaged Labor.

“Second, the Liberals switch from Malcolm Turnbull to Scott Morrison was the fourth time a sitting prime minister had been replaced outside an election since 2010. A majority of voters, 74 per cent, disapproved of this.

“Voters are getting weary of constant changes of prime minister.”

The 2019 Australian Election Study surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 2,100 voters. Other key findings from the 2019 include:

- A majority of voters (66 per cent) cast their ballots based on policy issues.
- The most important policy issues for voters were management of the economy (24 per cent), health (22 per cent) and environmental issues (21 per cent).
- Voters preferred the Coalition’s policies on management of the economy, taxation, and immigration.
- Voters preferred Labor’s policies on education,

health, and the environment.

- More voters indicated that global warming or the environment was the most important issue in casting their vote than at any other point on record.
 - Men were much more likely to vote for the Coalition than women (men: 48 per cent; women: 38 per cent).
 - Women were more likely to vote for the Greens (men: 9 per cent; women: 15 per cent).
 - Gender differences in voting have changed over time. In the 1990s men were slightly more likely to vote Labor than women. In recent elections women have become more likely to vote Labor.
 - There is a growing divide between younger and older voters. The 2019 election represented the lowest Liberal party vote on record for those under 35 (23 per cent), and the highest ever vote for the Greens (28 per cent).
 - Working class voters are much more likely to vote Labor than middle class voters (working class: 41 per cent; middle class: 29 per cent). Long-term trends show an erosion of Labor's working class base.
 - Asset ownership, including property and shares, was strongly associated with a higher vote for the Coalition.
- For the first time, following the election on the internet surpassed all other media sources, including television.
 - Following the 2019 election campaign, more voters saw a major difference between the parties than at any time since 1993.
 - The trend towards a more tolerant, inclusive society continued, particularly on moral issues. Support for abortion rights reached its highest level on record (Obtain readily: 73 per cent; in special circumstances: 23 per cent).
 - If a referendum were held to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution, 80 per cent responded that they would support this change.
 - Support for Australia becoming a republic has reached its lowest level on record – 49 per cent.
 - Since Donald Trump's 2016 election win, fewer Australians trust the United States to come to Australia's defence.

For more data and analysis, visit the Australian Election Study website at: www.australianelectionstudy.org

The Australian National University (9 December 2019).
Trust in government hits all time low. Retrieved from
www.anu.edu.au on 28 July 2020.

"With faith in democracy taking major hits all over the globe, winning back the people's trust and satisfaction would appear to be one of the most pressing and urgent challenges facing our political leaders and institutions."



ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA: CRISIS, RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL

*Parliaments are here to stay, in Australia (at both federal and state level) as well as elsewhere. That is all the more reason to seek reform that ensures they can thrive as a truly representative organ worthy of a democratic state, writes **Dr Tom Daly***

Viewed from the outside, and especially against a global trend of rising authoritarian populist parties and political forces, and governments opposed to key tenets of liberal democracy, Australia appears as a relatively resilient outlier.

For instance, most democracy assessment indices (although far from perfect as reflections of reality) have not registered any declines for the past decade. The country enjoys extremely high levels of voter enrolment and participation – 96.8 per cent of eligible voters were enrolled for the last federal election, and 91.9 per cent voted. In addition, the tampering with polling, electoral laws, and gerrymandering seen in a range of democratic states worldwide, is not a feature.

That said, a dominant narrative of crisis, paralysis and even decline has taken hold in recent years regarding the deficiencies of Australia's political system. The federal government and parliament's public image has been tarnished by a variety of factors including: the increasingly regular ousting and resignation of prime ministers (since 2007 Australia has had six prime ministers, as compared to six prime ministers in the previous 36 years (1971-2007)).

In addition, the composition of parliament still does not reflect the diversity of the Australian community. For example, women remain very under-represented in parliament: they comprise 36.6 per cent of the federal parliament after the May 2019 elections; and the proportion of women in senior leadership positions in parliament is far lower.

Some polls suggest that public faith in the political system and democracy has plummeted: A broad survey of polling data in December 2018 showed that fewer than 41% of Australian citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, a stark drop from 86% in 2007.

A CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION?

Australia's political system is facing similar challenges to many democratic systems worldwide. The political-party system has undergone significant shifts over recent electoral cycles, including declining support for the two mainstream parties (the Liberal-National Party Coalition and Labor), and a rise in support for smaller parties including the nationalist anti-immigrant Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, the Greens and newer parties such as the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers (SFF) Party.

The most recent data on voting volatility by the Australian National University shows that in 1987, 72%



of voters always voted for the same party, but by 2016 that number had dropped to 40%. This voter volatility has translated into a number of minority governments, or governments with only a slim majority, at a federal level since 2010. Before 2010, there hadn't been a hung parliament followed by the formation of a minority government for almost 70 years.

A dominant narrative of crisis, paralysis and even decline has taken hold in recent years regarding the deficiencies of Australia's political system.

Further, over the past 12 months, state elections in Victoria in November 2018 handed a landslide victory to the Victorian Labor party – making Daniel Andrews the first premier to win a second term for over a decade (2006). In the March 2019 state elections in New South Wales the sitting Liberal government retained power, albeit in a minority government. In May this year, the incumbent federal Coalition Government defied widespread predictions by pollsters and commentators by retaining government – albeit with only a two-seat majority.

Mirroring trends worldwide, the power of parliament is seen as diminishing in recent decades, vis-à-vis the executive and external organs (e.g. corporations).



OR A CRISIS OF PARTICIPATION?

Many critics of Australia's political system focus not just on how representative the existing structures are but on the need for a thorough reform of how we manage citizens' capacity to be heard. Increasingly, reformers look beyond parliament for solutions. Beyond voting in elections, there are few avenues for citizens to directly participate in governance – referendums being the main additional mechanism.

Citizens' assemblies, in particular, are increasingly touted worldwide as a way of re-energising public participation in the political process and improving policy itself. Australia has seen a variety of experiments with citizens' assemblies and participatory decision-making in the past decade, from the Citizens' Parliament on strengthening Australia's political system in 2009 to more localised current bodies including the Geelong Citizens' Jury and Melbourne People's Panel.

Australian reformers have also noted the global spread of such bodies, especially in Europe. In Ireland, experiments with deliberative bodies are viewed as key to achieving key constitutional reforms (e.g. introducing marriage equality). A range of assemblies are emerging in the UK, on issues such as climate change and the constitutional future of Scotland.

Perhaps most strikingly, as against the temporary nature of all such experiments worldwide to date (including in non-European states from Canada to Australia to Mongolia), February 2019 saw the world's first permanent Citizen Council established by the Parliament of the German-speaking community in Belgium as a co-equal institution to parliament. This Council will set the agenda and monitor follow-up by elected politicians of the recommendations of a number of citizens' assemblies (comprising 25 citizens each, selected by sortition).

THE END OF PARLIAMENT?

All of these questions prompt reflection on the end of parliament. That is, not the idea that the very *existence* of parliament is under threat, but that its end – its *purpose* – as a technology of representative government needs fundamental re-thinking to respond to multiple contemporary challenges.

Regarding the promise of citizens' assemblies, it is too early to tell whether current experiments will be successful. However, a range of recent analysis gives pause for thought.

Citizens' assemblies are increasingly touted worldwide as a way of re-energising public participation in the political process and improving policy itself.

Experts on Ireland's Citizens' Assembly, convened from November 2016 to March 2017, and which broke a longstanding political deadlock regarding the vexed issue of abortion reform, voice caution about seeing these bodies as a panacea. They identify multiple deficiencies and limitations in the operation of the Assembly. Practical shortcomings included difficulties in even securing enough citizens to participate, in the selection processes (which were not quite as random as envisaged) and selection of who would appear before it. More widely, some experts offered that the Assembly itself could not shore up the severe inadequacies of the political system and that its impact as an exercise in wider civic education is open to doubt.

We also need to consider whether these bodies are simply being used as 'bypass institutions' to avoid the difficult and overdue work of reforming existing underperforming political structures such as parliament by creating a new body to replicate what, ideally, parliament should do. Without dismissing the value of citizens' assemblies out of hand, it is worthwhile to ask whether, to some extent, they are little more than institutional sticking plaster. For some, the challenge is how to achieve a good marriage of the two: maximising the potential of citizen participation without overstressing its capacity, or displacing the need for collective organs like parliament.

Like parties, for all we may talk of reform, parliaments are here to stay, in Australia (at both federal and state level) as well as elsewhere. That is all the more reason to seek reform that ensures they can thrive as a truly representative organ worthy of a democratic state.

Election Watch is based at the School of Government, University of Melbourne.

Dr Tom Gerald Daly is Assistant Director, Melbourne School of Government.

Daly, TG (20 August 2019). *Electoral Democracy in Australia: Crisis, Resilience and Renewal*. Retrieved from <http://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au> on 28 July 2020.

Australians' trust in politicians and democracy hits an all-time low: new research

Democracy researchers **Mark Evans**, **Gerry Stoker** and **Max Halupka** find long-term evidence of an increasing trust divide between government and citizens

Over the past four years, we have conducted a range of attitudinal surveys with the Social Research Institute at Ipsos on the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy in Australia. Our latest research, conducted in July 2018 (prior to the Liberal Party's leadership spill), includes a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 20 focus groups and 1,021 Australians from a wide range of demographic backgrounds. We understood political trust in this survey as "keeping promises and agreements".

Our findings should give all democrats pause for thought. We continue to find compelling evidence of an increasing trust divide between government and citizens. This is reflected in the decline of democratic satisfaction and receding trust in politicians, political parties and other key institutions (especially media). We also found a lack of public confidence in the capacity of government to address public policy concerns.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE AND RENEWAL

Australians should rightly be proud of their hard-won democratic traditions and freedoms and the achievement of stable government, which has delivered social and economic wellbeing for its citizens.

The majority of Australians dislike the conflict-driven politics of the federal parliament, but don't dislike democratic values or democracy as a system of government.

When asked to select three aspects of Australian democracy that they liked the most, the top three in 2018 were (in order):

- "Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens"
- "Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle"
- "Australian elections are free and fair".

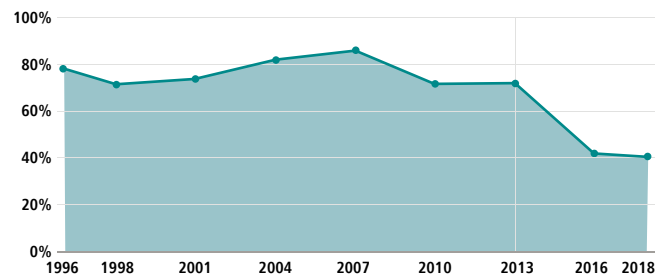
Respondents were least likely to choose features that praised (or showed engagement) with current democratic politics. The findings suggest that Australians are happy with the underlying democratic infrastructure of Australian society that allows them to achieve a high standard of living, but are less positive or engaged about day-to-day political operations.

AUSTRALIANS ARE DEEPLY UNHAPPY WITH DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Fewer than 41% of Australian citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, down from

86% in 2007. Public satisfaction has fallen particularly sharply since 2013, when 72% of Australian citizens were satisfied. Generation X is least satisfied (31%) and the Baby Boomers most satisfied (50%).

Percentage of citizens satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, 1996-2018



LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA

At a time of the "#Metoo" movement, women are generally less satisfied with democracy and more distrusting of politicians and political institutions.

In general, levels of trust in government and politicians in Australia are at their lowest levels since time-series data have been available. Just 31% of the population trust federal government. State and local governments perform little better, with just over a third of people trusting them. Ministers and MPs (whether federal or state) rate at just 21%, while more than 60% of Australians believe the honesty and integrity of politicians is very low.

The three biggest grievances people have with politicians are:

- They are not accountable for broken promises
- They don't deal with the issues that really matter
- Big business has too much power (Liberal and National Party voters identify trade unions instead of big business).

The continued decline of political trust has also contaminated public confidence in other key political institutions. Only five rate above 50% – police, military, civic wellbeing organisations (such as Headspace or community services), universities and healthcare institutions.

Trust was lowest in political parties (16%) and web-based media (20%). Trust in banks and web-based media has significantly decreased since the last survey. This reflects the impact of the banking royal commission and the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal.

People who are more likely to feel satisfied with the status quo include those aged over 55 (Baby Boomers), those earning more than \$200,000 a year and those who vote for the National or Liberal parties. They are more likely to be male and an immigrant, because those born overseas tend to be more satisfied with Australian politics than native-born.

Those who are most likely to be unhappy are Australian-born, female, aged in their 40s (Generation X) and struggling on less than \$50,000 a year. They are more likely to identify with minor political parties like One Nation, Centre Alliance or independents.

THE PERFECT STORM FOR INDEPENDENTS

Levels of social trust are also in decline. Social trust between people has fallen below 50% for the first time to 47%. A majority, though, still believe that people in their neighbourhood would help others out – except for the very rich (47%). Four attitudinal shifts are on display here.

First, many voters care more about effective and competent government than promises of more dollars in their pockets.

Second, there is a group of voters who are completely disconnected from traditional politics. They are deeply distrustful not just of politicians but almost every major institution and authority figure listed in the survey, except for their local GP.

Third, we can identify an increasingly large group of Australians who are deeply critical of the main political parties and are looking for an alternative across the ideological spectrum.

And fourth, there is a group of Australians who vote independent for tactical reasons, either to secure greater resources for their communities or to register a protest vote against the two-party system.

APPETITE FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM IS EXTREMELY STRONG

Our survey revealed a significant appetite for reform. Nine out of 15 proposed reforms received net agreement rates above 50%. The top five reforms favoured in the survey were:

- Limiting money donated to parties and spent in elections
- The right for voters to recall ineffective local MPs
- Giving all MPs a free vote in parliament
- Co-designing policies with ordinary Australians
- Citizen juries to solve complex problems that parliament can't fix.

Reforms aimed at improving the practice of representative politics were the most popular, followed by reforms aimed at giving citizens a greater say. There was also strong support for reforms aimed at creating a stronger community or local focus to decision-making. Only reforms aimed at guaranteeing the representation of certain groups failed to attract majority support.

Remarkably, accessing more detailed information about innovative reforms led to greater support for those reforms. This is an important finding, revealing

the importance of strategic communication in winning the war of ideas.

WE ARE AT THE TIPPING POINT

Liberal democracies are founded on a delicate balance between trust and distrust. Our survey findings suggest we may have reached a tipping point due to a deepening trust divide in Australia, which has increased in scope and intensity since 2007.

Yet citizens still appear to value the overall stability of their political system, even if the lack of political trust means they doubt its ability to deliver, especially on more challenging policy issues.

ALLEGIANCANT AND ASSERTIVE MODELS OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

ALLEGIANCANT

Emphasis on order and security

Deference to authority

Trust in institutions

Limited liberal view of democracy

Limited protest/protest potential

Traditional forms of participation

ASSERTIVE

Emphasis on voice and participation

Distance from authority

Scepticism of institutions

Expanded democratic expectations

Direct, elite challenging action

Mixture of traditional and new forms of participation

Australians imagine their democracy in a way that demonstrates support for a new participatory politics but with the aim of shoring up representative democracy and developing a more integrated, inclusive and responsive democratic system. In the light of this discovery, we believe an effective path to reform is not about choosing between representative and participatory democratic models, but finding linking arrangements between them.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and have disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Mark Evans is Professor of Governance and Director of Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide at Old Parliament House, University of Canberra.

Gerry Stoker is Fellow and Centenary Professor, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra.

Max Halupka is Research Fellow at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, University of Canberra.

THE CONVERSATION

Evans, M, Stoker, G, and Halupka, M (5 December 2018). *Australians' trust in politicians and democracy hits an all-time low: new research*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

WHICH CRISIS OF TRUST?

Are concerns about Australians' faith in politics and democracy exaggerated by poorly presented research? James Frost investigates for **Inside Story**

We have lost faith in our leaders ... Members of Parliament and Civil Servants ... live like Lords – while we have to cadge for food – to Hell with you all.

– Anonymous, Collingwood

Australian politics is in the midst of a crisis of trust. Australians are rapidly losing faith in politicians; young voters are increasingly disillusioned with politics; older voters are sick and tired of the endless cycle of new prime ministers. This has been the growing consensus since academics began routinely conducting public attitude surveys in the 1980s.

And the situation seems to be getting worse. Surveys by the Scanlon Foundation and the Democracy 2025 project – a collaboration between the University of Canberra's Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis and the Museum of Australian Democracy – show steep falls in political trust. So does the longest-running, best-known and most influential large-scale survey, the Australian Election Study, or AES, which began in 1987.

The AES's much-publicised overview report, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion*, released in late 2016, compares results for 152 survey questions asked over three decades or more, using both its own data and findings from surveys conducted by political scientist Don Aitkin in 1967, 1969 and 1979.

Of the graphs in the report, two have propelled the “trust crisis” narrative like no others. In one, 40 per cent of survey respondents say they are “not satisfied with democracy”; in the other, just 26 per cent agree that “people in government can be trusted.” *The Sydney Morning Herald's* headline – “The Fundamental Operating Model of Australian Politics Is Breaking Down” – was typical of the media's response to these findings.

But that headline made me wonder why, if political trust is so low, Australia isn't on the verge of revolution. The AES findings suggest a real feeling of anger with politics, politicians and political institutions, yet they don't seem to fit with day-to-day reality. Curious, I started looking more closely at opinions expressed about politicians and democracy in mainstream newspapers.

Here, too, the evidence wasn't reassuring. According to people who write letters to the editor, politicians “always think of themselves” and invariably break their promises. They are “loud-mouthed careerists” with nothing to offer but “words, words, words.” And, of course, they're “out of touch” with the concerns of the average citizen.

Running parallel were complaints aimed at voters by editors, academics and MPs themselves. An editorial criticised Australian voters because they “don't know

one candidate from another” and are mostly “apathetic” about politics in general. Certain ex-politicians and academics viewed voters as self-interested, disengaged political novices who, through “a system of crooked bargaining,” sell their votes to the highest bidder. It's a discouraging scene.

But I should come clean here. Every quote in those last two paragraphs, along with the quote at the top of this article, appeared in Australian regional and city newspapers and magazines in the early 1920s, the 1930s or the late 1940s – periods of social instability, political unrest, economic recession and even war. Yet they seem curiously familiar.

Jump forward a generation, to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and public trust in politics seems to have been even lower. “Australians are fed up with politics,” reported the Australian in April 1974, adding that widespread disillusionment with elections was part of “a general malaise.” According to one young would-be MP, “The Australian government ignores public opinion ... it ignores voters ... this country is run on every level by men who regard people as puppets, nothing more.”

We rarely acknowledge that liberal democracy requires a certain degree of distrust. Too much is a bad thing, of course, but we're not at crisis point yet.

Some young Australians were so disgruntled they formed a “people's parliament” where “all the people ignored and neglected by the [government] ... will have a chance to say their piece.” Compare this to young Australians today, who, according to one interpretation of the AES's data, “display a greater willingness to flirt with authoritarianism.” These are not exactly the “revolutionaries” that some of their parents were.

I'm not the first to point this out. In 2013, worried that the “trust crisis” narrative was dominating academic and public debate, historian Jackie Dickenson wrote *Trust Me: Australians and Their Politicians*, from where many of the quotes above are drawn. Her intention was to “challenge the assumption that political trust today is at an all-time low,” because an unquestioning acceptance of that belief “feeds cynicism and apathy, and threatens the engagement of voters in politics.”

Dickenson's work is part of a growing literature critical of the accuracy and consequences of the public attitude surveys that journalists draw on when they're writing about trust. In a critique published thirty-one years ago, social scientist Diego Gambetta argued that “trust” – just like “freedom,” “knowledge” and “justice” – is an “elusive” concept with no fixed meaning. More recently, another scholar, Guido Möllering, identified

“three perspectives” on trust, all of which contain further different ways of understanding the concept.

If “trust” can mean various things to one person, how can we be sure that social scientists are measuring the same idea when they survey 2000 respondents? And if we can’t be sure about definitions, how likely is it that surveys are assembling coherent sets of data? Yet the findings are rarely accompanied by caveats like these, so news of the crisis spreads unimpeded via the media and think-tanks through the public sphere.

Epistemological challenges aside, more straightforward problems are created when data are matched up from different sources. The two AES graphs I mentioned above are good examples: they draw on Don Aitkin’s 1969 and 1979 surveys, which were conducted as one-on-one interviews, and on AES data, which was gathered using paper questionnaires.

On the first theme covered by these graphs, Aitkin’s 1969 and 1979 surveys asked, “On the whole, how do you feel about the state of government and politics in Australia?” and provided four permissible answers: “very satisfied,” “fairly satisfied,” “not satisfied” and “don’t know.” The AES’s question, which it began asking in 1996, was significantly different: “On the whole, are you satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?”

Despite these differences, the AES’s 2016 report combines the two sets of data – its own and Aitkin’s – into a single graph under the headline, “Satisfaction with Democracy,” charting “yes” and “no” responses from 1969 to 2016. But Aitkin’s question didn’t make any reference to “democracy,” and included the word “feel,” which may have subtly influenced the way people answered. The differences between Aitkin’s question and the AES’s are referred to only in the endnotes to the report.

The AES’s “Trust in Government” graph also uses Aitkin’s 1969 and 1979 surveys as its starting point. Aitkin’s original question, “In general, do you feel that the people in government are too often interested in looking after themselves, or do you feel that they can be trusted to do the right thing nearly all the time?” had three possible answers: “Can be trusted,” “Look after themselves” and “Don’t know.” In 1993 the AES began asking a modified version of Aitkin’s question, “In general, do you feel that the people in government are too often interested in looking after themselves, or do you feel that they can be trusted to do the right thing nearly all the time?” with four possible answers: “Usually look after themselves,” “Sometimes look after themselves,” “Sometimes can be trusted to do the right thing” and “Usually can be trusted to do the right thing.” Again, the differences create obvious continuity problems, and once more a short explanation in the report’s notes doesn’t seem adequate.

Who can truthfully claim that one person’s feeling of satisfaction about “government and politics” is the same as another person’s professed support for “democracy”? It’s hard enough to identify a shared definition of what democracy means today, let alone confidently claim that 2000 respondents had the same

“democracy” in mind when they were asked about government and politics fifty years ago.

All this suggests that the “trust crisis” narrative might be at least partly due to how the results of public attitude surveys have been presented. That reporting may then create a feedback loop: after years of hearing the crisis mentioned by media reports based on values surveys, individuals are likely to be more suspicious of politics in all its forms, and answer surveys accordingly.

Don Aitkin was aware of the importance of putting his findings in a proper historical context. In his highly regarded book *Stability and Change in Australian Politics* (1982), which compares his 1969 and 1979 surveys, he is at pains to explain that “survey evidence would have had little meaning without the prior work of many historians, political scientists and sociologists.” Aitkin knew that survey work required more than simply acquiring data and presenting it to the world.

Public expectations can be shaped by seemingly factual information about the state of politics repeated over and over by the media – just as the Coalition’s recent victory was only a surprise because of public expectations created by polls predicting a solid Labor win. Pollsters around the country have had their profession tarnished by methodological errors and a failure to make clear the limitations of their findings. Indeed, two of Australia’s leading news outlets, *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, have decided to stop reporting polls for the foreseeable future.

The real value of surveys like the AES risks being undermined by the fact that they are often treated as the only way of gathering useful information about contemporary public attitudes. An overreliance on any single theory, analytical method or data-gathering technique only impoverishes the social sciences.

Perhaps with these concerns in mind, Democracy 2025’s first report, published in 2018, combined online questionnaires with twenty focus groups to measure public attitudes, and also explained its methods of analysis in detail. But its analysis, too, has led to alarmist headlines including “Australians No Longer Trust Their Democracy,” again highlighting the importance of historical contextualisation.

A final word on public trust in politics. We rarely acknowledge that liberal democracy requires a certain degree of distrust. Too much is a bad thing, of course, but we’re not at crisis point yet. Perhaps trust in politics is fluctuating as it always does, and is at a low ebb because of recent turbulence? If history is any guide, Australians will eventually return to merely disliking their politicians. We can only hope the “trust crisis” narrative has not diminished or fundamentally damaged the chances of this correction taking place.

James Frost is a PhD candidate and researcher in the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University.

Frost, J (18 July 2019). *Which crisis of trust?* Retrieved from <http://insidestory.org.au> on 28 July 2020.

WHAT ACTUALLY IS POPULISM? AND WHY DOES IT HAVE A BAD REPUTATION?

It is important to recognise populism and understand how it can shape our democracies – for better or worse, observes **Octavia Bryant** and **Benjamin Moffitt**

No doubt thanks to Donald Trump, Brexit, and a string of anti-establishment leaders and parties in Europe, Latin America and Asia, everyone seems to be talking about populism.

But populism is nothing new. It's long accompanied democratic politics, and its activity and success has experienced peaks and troughs. Right now we're in a bit of a heyday for populism, and this is impacting the nature of politics in general. So it's important we know what it means and how to recognise it.

Even among academics, populism has been difficult to define. This is partly because it has manifested in different ways during different times. While currently its most well-known cases are right-wing parties, leaders and movements, it can also be left-wing.

There's academic debate on how to categorise the concept: is it an ideology, a style, a discourse, or a strategy? But across these debates, researchers tend to agree populism has two core principles:

- It must claim to speak on behalf of ordinary people
- These ordinary people must stand in opposition to an elite establishment which stops them from fulfilling their political preferences.

These two core principles are combined in different ways with different populist parties, leaders and movements. For example, left-wing populists' conceptions of "the people" and "the elite" generally coalesce around socioeconomic grievances, whereas right-wing populists' conceptions of those groups generally tend to focus on socio-cultural issues such as immigration.

The ambiguity of the terms "the people" and "the elite" mean the core principles of people-centrism and anti-elitism can be used for very different ends.

HOW CAN APPEALING TO ORDINARY PEOPLE BE A BAD THING?

Populism gets a bad name for a couple of reasons.

First, because many of the most prominent cases of populism have recently appeared on the radical right, it has often been conflated with authoritarianism and anti-immigration ideas. But these features are more to do with the ideology of the radical right than they are to do with populism itself.

Second, populists are disruptive. They position themselves as outsiders who are radically different and separate from the existing order. So they frequently advocate for a change to the status quo and may champion the need for urgent structural change, whether that is economic or cultural. They often do this by promoting a sense of crisis (whether true or not),

and presenting themselves as having the solution to the crisis.

A current example of this process is Trump's southern border wall, where he's characterised the issue of illegal crossings on the southern border as a national emergency, despite, for example, more terrorist-related border crossings occurring on the northern, Canadian border and by air.

The fact populists often want to transform the status quo, ostensibly in the name of the people, means they can appear threatening to the democratic norms and societal customs many people value. And the very construction of "the people" plays a large part in populists being perceived as "bad", because it ostracises portions of society that don't fit in with this group.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF POPULIST LEADERS AND POLICIES?

The most famous contemporary example of a populist leader is the president of the United States, Donald Trump, and the renewed interest in populism is partly

Populism is nothing new. It's long accompanied democratic politics, and its activity and success has experienced peaks and troughs. Right now we're in a bit of a heyday for populism, and this is impacting the nature of politics in general.





Populism has two core principles: it must claim to speak on behalf of ordinary people; these ordinary people must stand in opposition to an elite establishment which stops them from fulfilling their political preferences.

due to his 2016 electoral success. One way researchers measure populism, and consequently determine whether a leader or party is populist, is through measuring language.

Research has found Trump's rhetoric during the campaign was highly populist. He targeted political elites, drawing on the core populist feature of anti-elitism and frequently used people-centric language, with a strong use of collective pronouns of "our" and "we".

He combined this populist language with his radical right ideology, putting forward policies such as "America First" foreign policy, his proposed wall between the US and Mexico, and protectionist and anti-globalisation economic policies.

The combination of populism and such policies allowed him to draw a distinction between "the people" and those outside that group (Muslims, Mexicans), emphasising the superiority of the former.

These policies also allow for the critiquing of the elite establishment's preference for globalisation, free trade and more liberal immigration policies. His use of the "drain the swamp" slogan – where he's claiming he'll rid Washington of elites who are out of touch with regular Americans – also reflects this.

Along with Trump, Brexit has also come to exemplify contemporary populism, because of its European Union-centred anti-elitism and the very nature of the referendum acting as an expression of "the people's" will.

In South America, populism has been most associated with the left. The late Hugo Chavez, former president of Venezuela, was also highly populist in

his rhetoric, and is perhaps the most famous example of a left-wing populist leader. Chavez's populism was centred around socioeconomic issues. Even while governing, he positioned himself as an anti-establishment politician, channelling the country's oil revenues into social programs with the aim of distributing wealth among the Venezuelan people, relieving poverty and promoting food security.

The current Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and the Bolivian president, Evo Morales are also considered left-wing populist leaders.

But left-wing populism is not just confined to South America. In Europe, contemporary examples of left-wing populist parties include the Spanish Podemos and the Greek Syriza. These parties enjoyed success in the aftermath of the Great Recession. They questioned the legitimacy of unregulated capitalism and advocated structural economic changes to alleviate the consequences of the recession on their people.

It doesn't look like populism is going anywhere. So it's important to know how to recognise it, and to understand how its presence can shape our democracies, for better or worse.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Benjamin Moffitt receives funding from the Australian Research Council. Octavia Bryant does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond her academic appointment.

Octavia Bryant is Doctoral Candidate, National School of Arts, Australian Catholic University.

Benjamin Moffitt is Senior Lecturer & ARC DECRA Fellow, Australian Catholic University.

THE CONVERSATION

Bryant, O, and Moffitt, B (6 February 2019). *What actually is populism? And why does it have a bad reputation?* Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

Political reform: addressing the decline of public trust in government and democracy

A submission to the Senate inquiry into nationhood, national identity, and democracy by Danielle Wood and Kate Griffiths from the **Grattan Institute**

Summary

The Senate has initiated a broad inquiry touching on national and cultural identity, citizenship, globalisation, social cohesion, and 'other related matters'. Our comments are confined to helping address the Committee's concerns about the 'worrying decline in the level of public trust' in government and democracy.

In Australia, trust in government is at an all-time low. Trust matters to the legitimacy of government and

to its ability to get things done. Over time, widespread loss of trust in political institutions can undermine representative democracy.

There are many causes of declining trust. Globalisation and cultural anxiety are part of the story, as is the changing media landscape. But the actions and inactions of politicians are part of the problem too.

Surveys show that Australians are particularly concerned about corruption and misconduct by politicians. Most Australians believe that politicians look

SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY

Following are questions raised in a discussion paper released prior to the Australian **Senate** conducting an inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy

Some researchers highlight that democratic decline can occur through subtle erosion of democratic norms.¹⁰ Some have also raised the possibility of 'illiberal democracies' that, while perhaps enjoying widespread public support, do not respect principles such as the rule of law or separation of powers.¹¹

- What does a democratic culture look like and how can it be nurtured?
- Why are there declining levels of public trust and satisfaction with democracy? Is one factor a perceived or actual failure of democratic governments to deliver?
- What are the implications of declining trust for Australia's democracy? How can these trends be reversed?
- Would you distinguish between dissatisfaction with democracy and dissatisfaction with liberal democratic values such as the rule of law and separation of powers?
- What could be done to encourage adherence to liberal democratic norms and conventions? What is the role of gatekeepers, such as major political parties or the media, in preserving liberal democratic norms and conventions?
- What are the implications of international law and treaties for a domestic democracy and sovereignty? How should we think about democratic representation as countries become increasingly connected and interdependent?
- What is the role of electoral systems including, for example, compulsory voting?
- What is the role of civics education?
- How should we consider the tensions between representative and delegative democracy? How should governments represent both the majority and the minority?
- Could Australia's democracy be enhanced through, for example, forms of deliberative democracy or participatory democracy?
- How are the challenges and opportunities facing Australia similar or different to those of other democracies? What could Australia learn from other democracies?
- Is there a connection between satisfaction with democracy and economic conditions, such as living standards or wages growth?

10. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future*, 2018, pp.1-10.

11. See, for example, Fareed Zakaria, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.76, No.6 (November/December 1997), pp.22-43.

Source: The Senate, Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (2019), *Inquiry into nationhood national identity and democracy: Discussion paper*.

after themselves and their mates, at the expense of the public interest.

Yet many politicians at the Commonwealth level remain reluctant to acknowledge and respond to concerns about corruption and undue influence. Politicians – particularly in the major political parties – need to take ownership of the crisis of trust.

To help rebuild public trust, the Committee should focus on political integrity and leadership. Practical, low-cost reforms are available. Improving the transparency and accountability of political institutions could help reassure the public that the system is working for them.

Stronger checks and balances on policy influence are needed, to make Australian politics cleaner and fairer. Reforms should include:

- Improving the visibility of major donors to political parties;
- Publishing ministerial diaries, so people know who ministers meet with;
- Creating a public register of lobbyists who have unescorted access to federal Parliament House;
- Establishing a strong and well-resourced integrity commission, to investigate corrupt and high-risk misconduct in the public sector, with capacity to receive and investigate tip-offs;
- Introducing a code of conduct for all parliamentarians, appointing an ethics adviser, and ensuring all codes of conduct are independently administered; and
- Capping political advertising expenditure during election campaigns, to limit the influence of money in politics.

Further analysis of the crisis of trust in Australian politics, and detail on our recommendations to strengthen checks on policy influence, are provided in the attached Grattan Institute reports.

THE CRISIS OF TRUST IS LARGELY WITH POLITICIANS

To help rebuild public trust, the Committee should focus on political integrity and leadership. Surveys indicate that politicians and political parties have suffered the most significant diminution of trust. Recognising and taking ownership of the problem are the first steps to helping reassure the public that the system is working for them.

Australians are losing trust – particularly in politicians

Trust in government is at an all-time low: only a quarter of Australians surveyed in 2016 agreed that ‘people in government can be trusted to do the right thing’.¹

Australians are particularly suspicious that ‘people in government look after themselves’ (74 per cent) and that ‘government is run for a few big interests’ (56 per cent) – and these perceptions have been rising since 2007.² In a 2018 survey, 85 per cent of Australians thought at least some federal MPs were corrupt.³

Many Australians are worried that interest groups with the resources or connections to lobby and influence politicians get special treatment.⁴ In a recent public survey, 56 per cent of respondents said they had ‘personally witnessed or suspected’ public officials making decisions that favoured a business or individual who gave them political donations or support.⁵ And the number was even higher among those who had worked in federal government.⁶

Loss of trust in government is yet to infect other public institutions. The World Values Survey shows that most Australians maintain high trust in the courts, the armed forces, and police. Confidence in the public service is just below 50 per cent, but has not been declining in the same way as it has for the political class.⁷

Over time, loss of trust in political institutions can undermine representative democracy. It erodes the social contract between citizen and state. It can affect citizens’ willingness to accept and abide by the law. And in a low-trust environment, individuals and businesses are less willing to take risks, to innovate, and to invest, dampening economic growth.

Loss of trust also makes legislating policy change more complex, because it is harder for governments without political capital to enact ‘difficult but necessary’ reforms (risking a vicious cycle of distrust and policy paralysis).

Politicians are failing to take ownership of the crisis

While there are many causes of falling trust and increasing exasperation with the political establishment,⁸ political scandals and politicians failing to address public suspicions about corruption and misconduct are significant contributors.

When apparent favours for friends, expensive gifts, and cashed-up post-politics advisory jobs go unchecked – often without even an independent investigation – it demonstrates that accountability is lacking and raises real concerns about integrity.

Yet politicians remain reluctant to acknowledge and respond to questions about their integrity.⁹

Politicians – particularly from the major political parties – need to take ownership of the crisis of trust and accept responsibility for rebuilding public trust.

Cultural anxieties are also at play

The Committee’s discussion paper blames ‘populist, conservative nationalist, and nativist’ movements and ‘extreme movements of the eco-fundamentalist and postmodernist variety’ for declining trust.¹⁰ These movements are more likely symptoms than causes.

Cultural anxiety is part of the story – many Australians, particularly those living in regional areas, are unhappy with the way the world is changing, feel ‘left behind’, and want to ‘take back control’.¹¹

Politicians should seek to dampen rather than inflame cultural differences. Language and symbols matter in these debates. Politicians can take a positive



leadership role in stressing the common ground between city and country and between communities with different backgrounds.

The Committee suggests ‘economic factors may also be relevant’. But economic factors do not appear to be the main culprit. The largest decline in trust and increase in support for minor parties in Australia happened during a period of strong wages growth and relatively stable income inequality.¹² Minor party voters are more likely to have negative views about globalisation and free trade, but on other economic policy issues, particularly redistribution, voters for minor parties don’t look substantially different to major party voters.

The main distinction between minor party voters and major party voters is that the former have significantly lower trust in government. Voters for One Nation stand out as having the lowest levels of trust in government. Further analysis of the causes of falling trust and the rising vote for minor parties is provided in the Grattan Institute report: *A crisis of trust: the rise of protest politics in Australia*.

A PRACTICAL FIRST STEP: IMPROVE THE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Practical, popular, low-cost reforms are available to help rebuild public trust. What’s missing has been political will. Politicians should start at home by reforming their own shop: including improving political donations laws, increasing the transparency of lobbying activities, and ensuring independent investigation of misconduct.

Improve transparency in policy making

Public cynicism about corruption and special-interest influence is partly born of secrecy. Greater transparency around money and access in politics would give the public, media, and parliament itself more

opportunity to scrutinise the policy making process and call out undue influence or give voice to under-represented views.

In a recent report,¹³ we recommended several reforms to reduce the secrecy around money and access in politics:

- Improve the ‘visibility’ of major political donors by lowering the donations disclosure threshold from \$13,800 to \$5,000, requiring political parties to aggregate multiple donations from the same donor, and mandating quicker release of donations data;
- Create a public register of lobbyists who have unescorted access to federal Parliament House (that is, sponsored orange pass holders); and
- Publish ministerial diaries, so people know who federal ministers meet with – as NSW and Queensland already do.

Transparency is not enough on its own – strong voices are still needed to call out problems, and voters still need to hold elected officials to account. But transparency gives them better information to do so.

Politicians should accept greater accountability

The public is clearly concerned about the standard of ethical conduct of politicians, even if corrupt conduct is rare. Politicians should accept greater accountability, to help rebuild public trust.

A strong and well-resourced integrity commission

The Commonwealth Government’s proposal to establish a Commonwealth Integrity Commission (CIC) is an important and timely initiative.¹⁴ It recognises the need for a central body at the federal level with ultimate responsibility for the prevention, detection, and investigation of corruption across the public sector.

But the design of the CIC is extremely important for its actual and perceived effectiveness. The Govern-

ment's initial proposal appears to exclude several powers required for an effective CIC:¹⁵

- The CIC needs to be able to act on tips and information from the public, media, and public officials (including whistle-blowers) – not just from other integrity agencies;
- The CIC should be empowered to investigate serious or systemic corruption risks as well as corrupt conduct; and
- The CIC should publish findings of fact as well as refer any criminal conduct to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

Adequate funding is also important – current funding is insufficient given the CIC's proposed scope.¹⁶

The Government should address these deficiencies before establishing the CIC. A poorly resourced and narrowly focused CIC is unlikely to help rebuild public trust.

Set clear standards for policy makers

An integrity commission – even a powerful and properly resourced one – is not enough on its own to prevent misconduct in public office. Some forms of misconduct – such as favouring special interests – may not be illegal, but still have large costs for society and undermine public trust.¹⁷

Clear standards around conflicts of interest – as currently exist for ministers – should apply to all parliamentarians. A code of conduct for parliamentarians should at a minimum clarify rules on accepting

corporate hospitality, gifts, and secondary employment. A broader code would set a standard for the public, media and parliament to hold elected officials to.¹⁸

Codes of conduct need to be administered and enforced by an independent body. Current arrangements are ineffective.¹⁹ Arms-length administration of the rules is necessary to build public confidence that codes of conduct are respected and adhered to. This could be an additional role for the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority.

An independent body should have an educative role, to help parliamentarians, ministerial staff, and lobbyists understand their responsibilities and disclosure obligations.²⁰ A separate ethics adviser should be appointed, to enable current and former parliamentarians to seek advice when they are in doubt.

The independent body should be able to investigate non-compliance with codes of conduct, publish its findings, and refer serious concerns to the integrity commission.

Cap political advertising expenditure during election campaigns

Political advertising expenditure should be capped during election campaigns, to limit the influence of money in politics.²¹ Capping expenditure would help reduce the reliance of political parties on major donors and limit the 'arms race' between parties for more donations.

Political advertising by other groups, such as unions and industry peak bodies, should also be capped to prevent them 'swamping' public debate during election campaigns.

Further detail about the need for and nature of these reforms is provided in the attached Grattan Institute report: *Who's in the room? Access and influence in Australian politics*.

Collectively these reforms would strengthen the integrity of Australia's political institutions and offer a direct response to the public's concerns.

ENDNOTES

1. Cameron and McAllister (2016).
2. Cameron and McAllister (2016).
3. Transparency International Australia (2018).
4. Transparency International Australia (2018), Cameron and McAllister (2016), and Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers (2018).
5. A telephone poll of 2,218 adults conducted by Griffith University and Transparency International Australia in May-June 2018.
6. Transparency International Australia (2018), and Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers (2018).
7. Sheppard, McAllister, and Makkai (2018).
8. Others include the changing media landscape, political parties and politicians becoming more removed from society at large, and governments over-promising and under-delivering (in part because governments have less direct control over the economy since the deregulation and privatisation reforms of the 1980s and 90s). See Wood, Daley, and Chivers (2018), pp. 76-81.
9. Griffiths and Wood (2019a).
10. See also Scafton (2019).
11. Wood, Daley, and Chivers (2018), pp. 56-68.
12. Wood, Daley, and Chivers (2018), pp. 29-48.



POSSIBLE REFORMS TO OUR DEMOCRACY

A list of democratic innovation options for Australians to consider, courtesy of a survey conducted by **Democracy 2025**

- Parties and candidates could be limited in how much money they can spend on election campaigning and how much they can accept from donors.
- Public services could be co-designed with Australian citizens.
- Local communities could have the right to recall their Member of Parliament for a new election if they fail to provide effective representation during the parliamentary term.
- MPs could be allowed a free vote in Parliament.
- Citizen juries based on the criminal jury system and comprised of a random sample of up to 15 Australian citizens could be used to solve complex policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.
- Ordinary party members and voters could have more say in choosing party leaders and election candidates.
- Performance review for politicians could be conducted biannually by a panel consisting of a senior parliamentarian and four randomly selected members of the MP's constituency.
- Provisions could be made to allow Australian citizens the

right to e-petition the Australian Parliament for public interest legislation to be debated.

- The committee system in Parliament could be used to consider legislation before it is introduced to try and find agreement.
- Postal voting could be used to resolve policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.
- The size of electorates could be reduced to ensure that MPs are more responsive to their communities.
- Dual citizens could be able to stand for election without renouncing their overseas citizenship.
- To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats could be allocated on the basis of gender.
- To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats could be allocated on the basis of ethnicity.
- To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats could be allocated on the basis of age.

SOURCE

Democracy 2025, Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House (30 September 2019), *RE: Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy*, Table 2. What do Australians think about democratic innovation?, p.10.

13. Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers (2018).

14. Attorney-General's Department (2018).

15. Griffiths and Wood (2019b).

16. See Brown et al. (2018).

17. Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers (2018).

18. An example of such a code is the Queensland Parliament's Code of Ethical Standards, which is built on fundamental principles of: integrity of the Parliament; primacy of the public interest; independence of members; appropriate use of information; respect for people; and appropriate use of entitlements. Legislative Assembly of Queensland (2018).

19. Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers (2018).

20. It could even play a broader role in professional development, see Coghill (2008a and 2008b).

21. Advertising accounts for most campaign spending by the major parties in Australia, and it is easier to identify and regulate than other political expenditure (Wood, Griffiths, and Chivers, 2018).

REFERENCES

- Attorney-General's Department (2018). *A Commonwealth Integrity Commission – proposed reforms*. Consultation paper, 13 December: www.ag.gov.au/Consultations/Pages/commonwealth-integrity-commission.aspx
- Brown, A., Graycar, A., Kelly, K., Coghill, K., Prenzler, T. and Janet Ransley. *A National Integrity Commission – Options For Australia*. August. Griffith University.
- Cameron, S. M. and McAllister, I. (2016). *Trends in Australian Political Opinion Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2016*. Australian National University. <http://australianelectionstudy.org/>
- Coghill et al. (2008a). Coghill, K., Donohue, R. and Holland, P. 'Parliamentary Accountability To The Public – Developing MPs' Ethical Standards'. *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 23.1, pp. 101-120.
- Coghill et al. (2008b). Coghill, K., Holland, P., Donohue,

R., Rozzoli, K. and Grant, G. 'Professional development programmes for members of parliament'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 61.1, pp. 73-98.

- Griffiths, K. and Wood, D. (2019a). How federal politicians can regain their integrity. *Inside Story*, March 29: <https://insidestory.org.au/how-federal-politicians-can-regain-their-integrity/>
- Griffiths, K. and Wood, D. (2019b). Why the federal government's new integrity commission isn't up to the job. *The Conversation*, February 4: <https://theconversation.com/why-the-federal-governments-new-integrity-commission-isnt-up-to-the-job-110441>
- Legislative Assembly of Queensland (2018). Code of Ethical Standards. www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/assembly/procedures/codeofethicalstandards.pdf
- Scafton, M. (2019). On the blindness of politicians. *Pearls and Irritations*, September 4: <https://johnmenadue.com/mike-scafton-on-the-blindness-of-politicians/>
- Sheppard, J., McAllister, I. and Makkai, T. (2018). *Australian Values Study: Australia's voice in the World Values Survey*. Social Research Centre, Australian National University, www.srcentre.com.au/ausvalues
- Transparency International Australia (2018). *Rising Corruption Concern Drives Support For Federal Integrity Body: Global Corruption Barometer Survey Results*: <https://transparency.org.au/media-release-gcb-survey-2018/>
- Wood, D., Daley, J., and Chivers, C. (2018). *A crisis of trust: The rise of protest politics in Australia*. Grattan Institute: <https://grattan.edu.au/report/a-crisis-of-trust/>
- Wood, D., Griffiths, K., and Chivers, C. (2018). *Who's in the room? Access and influence in Australian politics*. Grattan Institute: <https://grattan.edu.au/report/whos-in-the-room/>

Wood, D. and Griffiths, K (30 September 2019). *Submission to inquiry into nationhood, national identity, and democracy*. Retrieved from <http://grattan.edu.au> on 28 July 2020.

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

Reforming our democracy – options for renewing democracy in Australia

This policy reform options paper was developed through a collaborative partnership between the **University of Melbourne**, the **newDemocracy Foundation** and the **Susan McKinnon Foundation**

Introduction

This paper provides a list of reform options to improve Australia's democracy. We put these proposals to Australia's political parties ahead of the 2019 election because we believe that democracy matters. Australia's democracy has been critical to our nation's success, but it is frayed and public confidence in our system of governance is in worrying decline.

At various points in our history Australia has led the world in democratic innovation. From the 1850s, our colonial parliaments extended the vote in radical ways and established basic ideals like the Eight Hour Day that influenced global thinking. From the 1890s, Australia led the way with the suffragettes extending democratic rights for women, literally decades ahead of other nations like the United States and parts of Europe.

From 1901, our federation model of government was best-in-class, encompassing the best aspects of Britain, the United States and Europe whilst also drawing on local innovations of our own. As a young and growing nation, we need to keep renewing our democratic ideals by making reforms where necessary, and true to our history, we need to keep leading the way.

We believe that each idea in this paper will enhance trust in government decision-making and improve confidence in Australian democracy. We invite you to review the list and indicate which ideas meet with your support. Some of the proposals in this paper are easier

to implement than others. Some are very modest. Some measures are far reaching, so a suggested next step is the undertaking of a trial or review. Some could be implemented through the executive, some require legislative change and therefore parliamentary support, some require constitutional change and a vote of the people.

The list of initiatives has been selected because they are practical, realistic and achievable. They will not solve all the problems of our democracy, but they are a set of good "next steps" for the next parliament. The diversity of the political backgrounds of our signatories and the experience of our experts should give you confidence that this is a list of reforms that are implementable.

The approaching federal election presents us with an opportunity to rekindle the spirit of ingenuity that once made Australia a leader in democratic innovation. We would welcome the opportunity to provide more information and evidence to support policy development on any of the initiatives contained within this document.

REFORM OPTIONS FOR RENEWING AUSTRALIA'S DEMOCRACY

We, the undersigned, believe that the following fifteen commitments, if implemented by the next Australian Federal Government, will help to improve Australia's democracy:

KEY COMMITMENTS

1. Commit to a review of parliamentary terms to provide more certainty and improve government decision making.
2. Appoint a genuinely independent Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.
3. Undertake a trial of changes to seating arrangements in parliament to encourage it to operate with more civility and help to promote real, constructive dialogue.
4. Introduce more 'free votes' in the parliament, through a new parliamentary convention or the introduction of the United Kingdom's Three Line Whip approach.
5. Commit to real reform on political donations and campaign financing that promotes a more equal opportunity for all parties and candidates to participate in the political process.
6. Implement more stringent transparency requirements for political parties to help improve the public's understanding of how parties operate.
7. Undertake a trial of AEC-issued candidate information packs that give voters more information about local candidates so that they can make properly informed choices.
8. Undertake a process after each election that gives citizens a chance to openly communicate their views on how we can improve elections and our democracy.
9. Commit political parties to the same standards that companies are bound by when they advertise during election campaigns to promote better truth in advertising.
10. Implement comprehensive and continual professional training in policy, ethics and procedures for ministers, members of parliament and ministerial staff.
11. Commit to stronger regulation of lobbyists.
12. Implement an independent selection process for senior appointments to the Australian Public Service, the judiciary and major statutory bodies that includes improved parliamentary oversight but does not limit the ability of governments to enact change.
13. Commit to a trial of a citizen jury which would allow a small representative sample of the community to explore a major national issue in depth.
14. Lead a national conversation to renew Australian democracy and update the Constitution.
15. Lead a national conversation about the operation of the Australian Federation.

THE PARLIAMENT

1. *A review of parliamentary terms*

By world standards, Australia's three-year parliamentary terms are exceptionally short. The problems this creates are further exacerbated by their unfixed nature.

The Australian Government should commit to exploring longer, fixed terms for the House of Representatives. Acknowledging the complexities that arise for Senate terms, the government should commit to a review of options for the length of Senate Terms. Extending the current three-year term in the House of Representatives would result in greater certainty and political stability and would allow governments to commit to longer-term policy making. To ensure adequate accountability during these longer terms, this reform should be supplemented by other measures that support democratic accountability and participation such as some of the measures contained in this document. This reform would require a referendum to change the Australian Constitution.

2. *A truly independent speaker and president*

The office of Speaker and President should be turned into a quasi-judicial office with the holders of the office being seen as truly independent and not attending party room meetings.

The Speaker or President should be appointed for set terms of service and not easily removable by the government of the day. The Speaker or President would be sworn to conduct their role in an impartial way to ensure clear and fair debate that is readily accessible and understood by the general public. This includes insisting on the facts and clarifying the argument, as occurs in a court of law. Appointments would be awarded to people with expertise and understanding of parliamentary practice and procedure. One option would be for the role of Speaker and President to be made up of a small panel that are chosen by a bi-partisan parliamentary committee.

3. *New seating arrangements in the House of Representatives and the Senate*

The current fixed seating plan in parliament promotes a hostile and at times unhelpful form of parliamentary debate which divides parliamentarians along party lines. Several measures could be trialled or introduced to improve the dynamics in the chamber and promote more constructive and civilised debate:

- a. The Australian Government should run a trial of a ballot system that randomly allocates an MP or Senator's seat across the various sitting weeks, so MP's are not always seated alongside party members. The trial could be run for one sitting session: either Autumn, Winter (Budget) or Summer; and
- b. Run a one-week trial wherein, during Question Time, ministers answer questions from a lectern located to the right of the Speaker rather than across the dispatch box directly opposite their opponents.

4. *More 'free votes' in the parliament*

All votes by parliamentarians should be free except those relating to pre-election commitments. Parliament is often at its best when 'issues of conscience' are debated and MP's can cast a 'free vote'. Parliament could operate in this way more often if the parties committed to allowing a 'free vote' on a broader range of issues. Of course, electors vote for parties because they like their policies, and electors need to have confidence that these policies will be supported by their local member. However, a new convention could be developed that broadens the kind of questions a member could vote freely on, particularly when the issue is not clearly covered by the party's manifesto.

Australia could consider the system used in the British Parliament, with single, two-line and three-line whips for party member MP's. A single line is guidance. A double line requires attendance and is expected to be adhered to. A three-line whip is serious and any MP who doesn't adhere to it risks their position being questioned. The British system still provides for party discipline, but also formally allows for more freedom in the voting of MPs.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

5. *Campaign finance and political party funding reform*

Campaign finance and political funding in Australia has been widely criticised for the lack of transparency it affords the electorate, the disproportionate level of influence it offers to those who have the financial resources to pay for it and the way it disadvantages some political participants. The Australian Government should commit to one or more of the following measures to enhance the integrity of campaign financing and political funding:

- a. Political donations above \$1,000 are disclosed as close to real time as the AEC deems reasonable and achievable (current public disclosure trigger is \$13,800 the following year);
- b. Setting an annual maximum limit for political donations; and
- c. Placing limits on campaign spending applying to candidates, political parties and other political organisations. This could be coupled to a new requirement that commercial electronic media operators provide time without charge for political messages.

6. *Greater reporting transparency from political parties*

The Australian Government should commit to implementing greater transparency requirements for all political parties in Australia. Political parties are not bound by the same robust transparency requirements that companies, community organisations and charities are. This limits the level of knowledge and understanding that the public has about how parties operate. As a first step, a commitment to greater transparency could see political parties begin to publish their membership

numbers and financial details annually, as well as details of their governance structures.

7. Candidate information packs at elections

Good democracy depends on citizens being able to make informed decisions when voting on election day. Therefore, the Australian Government should undertake a trial at a by-election or in a single electorate where citizens receive candidate information packs that are administered by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). These packs would be disseminated online, mailed to homes and be available at the ballot box on voting day. Contained within them would be a formal policy manifesto document from each party/candidate, a candidate statement, the candidate's business interests and affiliations and a simple disclosure ballot that compares the level of donations received by each candidate and the source of those donations.

8. Citizen input into elections and our democracy

At its simplest, democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people. We call on the next government to undertake a process that gives "the people" more input into how elections are run and how our democracy operates. After every election, the Parliament through the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) reviews the conduct of the last election with a view to seeing if any of the rules and regulations need to be updated. After the 2019 Election the Australian Government should run a parallel process to ask citizens their view of the election and 'How can we do democracy better?'. This could be done through a Citizen Panel or series of Citizen Panels, with a commitment that their report(s) is(are) the subject of a free debate in the parliament, with a formal response from the government within 90 days.

9. Truth in advertising during election campaigns

The standard Australians are used to about truth in advertising is set in the *Competition & Consumer Act 2010* (formerly the *Trade Practices Act*) which prohibits communication with the "intent, or likely effect, to mislead or deceive". That is a standard Australians have the right to expect during Federal election campaigns. Our courts have been able to identify appropriate balancing remedies for companies breaching this rule, so the Australian Government should have equal confidence that courts would be able to identify proportionate penalties through litigation following an election if a political party is found to have breached this standard. Such a move would act as a deterrent for those parties willing to breach this standard.

OPERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT

10. Professional training of ministerial staff, members of parliament and ministers

In modern Australia, senior executives or managers are required to undergo a high level of management

and skills training. On company and charity boards stringent requirements apply in relation to training and skills development. Strangely, no such requirement substantively applies to ministerial staff, government ministers or members of parliament.

Orientation training for new MPs as it currently exists does not go far enough to educate those who represent us in critical management, financial analysis, governance and behavioural areas. An Australian politician, who has responsibility for matters affecting the interests of millions of his or her fellow citizens, should be assisted by receiving a comprehensive level of training about their duties, responsibilities and the technical knowledge required for the role. This can be achieved through the introduction of comprehensive, professional training for members of parliament and ministers. Given their influence in the political process, ministerial staff would also receive this sort of training.

11. Stronger regulation on lobbying

The Australian Government should commit to ensuring that lobbyists (both in-house and commercial) are subject to stricter regulation by disclosing information relating to fundraiser activities and the publication of summaries of meetings with ministers and ministerial staff.

12. Executive appointments

The next Australian Government should implement an independent process for senior appointments to the Australian Public Service, the judiciary and major statutory bodies as well as improved parliamentary oversight. Appointments should continue to be made by the responsible minister and/or cabinet, respecting the fact that governments are elected to deliver change. However, appointments should be made after a rigorous independent process has been carried out and parliament should be given the opportunity to scrutinise and comment on the appointment.

A NATIONAL CONVERSATION TO BUILD CONSENSUS AND 'GET THINGS DONE'

13. A major trial of a citizens' jury

Citizens' juries allow a small representative random sample (roughly matched to the Census profile) of the community to explore a major issue in considerable depth and assist with the co-design of public services. Politicians are regularly accused of being too focused on their immediate political ends and this mechanism helps government to earn trust by injecting an informed common-ground position that comes from Australians of all walks of life who are willing to share the decision.

A diverse group of citizens, like a jury, spend several months exploring the issue and developing a report that explains where common ground can be found. This is then tabled to government and parliament for all parties to respond to. The Australian Government should test the use of a Citizens' Jury on a major national issue such as tax reform, health funding or fair levels of welfare.

14. Updating the Australian Constitution

Throughout this process it should consider but not be limited to:

-

These policy reform options have been written, reviewed and endorsed by the following individuals and organisations: Professor Peter Shergold, AC Chancellor, Western Sydney University Secretary, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (2003-2008); Professor Glyn Davis, AC Emeritus Professor, Melbourne School of Government; Mr John Brumby, AO Premier of Victoria (2007-2010); Mr Campbell Newman, Premier of Queensland (2012-2015); Mr Innes Willox, Chief Executive, Australian Industry Group; Professor Cheryl Saunders AO, Laureate Professor Emeritus, Constitutional and Public Law, Melbourne Law School; Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Expert in Democratic Reform Professor, Melbourne Law School; Mr Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, AM Founder, The newDemocracy Foundation; Mr Grant Rule, Co-Founder, Susan McKinnon Foundation; Mr Nicholas Reece, Principal Fellow, Melbourne School of Government; Ms Sam Mellett Director, Susan McKinnon Foundation; Mr Iain Walker, Executive Director, The newDemocracy Foundation; Dr Lyn Carson, Research Director, The newDemocracy Foundation.

University of Melbourne, newDemocracy Foundation
and Susan McKinnon Foundation. *Reforming Our
Democracy – Options for Renewing Democracy in Australia*.
Retrieved from www.newdemocracy.com.au on 28 July 2020.

15. A commitment to a better federation

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

AUSTRALIA NEEDS FIXED FOUR-YEAR PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

Australian democracy would operate much more effectively if we had fixed four-year terms at federal level, argues Cathy Harper from **Election Watch**

When Australians vote in the federal election on May 18 it will be less than three years since they last voted, and less than three years since they voted in the election before that. Over that period, we've witnessed political chaos that has taken leadership instability in this country to unprecedented levels – we've changed Prime Ministers six times in about nine years.

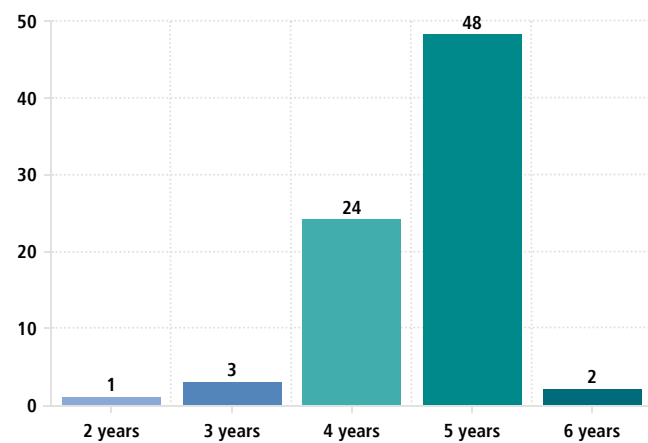
Our system of three-year terms at a federal level, with the election date able to be set by the government, contributes to leadership uncertainty and the difficulty in making long-term policy.

The Constitution specifies that terms of the House of Representatives are a maximum of three years. However, the exact election date is decided by the

The situation is different at a state level. All states and territories, except Queensland, have moved to fixed four-year terms. Internationally, four- or five-year terms are the norm in democratic systems.



Length of parliamentary lower house terms in all countries with bicameral legislatures



government (if approved by the Governor-General) and federal governments have on average only lasted for a bit more than two and a half years.

The situation is different at a state level. All states and territories, except Queensland, have moved to fixed four-year terms. Internationally, four- or five-year terms are the norm in democratic systems.

Australia's short election cycle at a federal level has been the subject of much criticism for decades. These criticisms centre around the political and economic uncertainty created when elections are held less than three years apart; and the difficulty of creating long-term policy when the political reality is that parties spend a significant proportion of that time preparing for the next election.

Then there's the cost of holding elections every few years or less. The 2016 election cost more than \$286 million, which is about \$19 per voter. Holding federal elections is a huge logistical exercise. Australia has about 16 million enrolled voters, and our compulsory voting system ensures more than 90% participation.

Hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars would be saved if federal elections were held less frequently.

There have been serious efforts to change the situation. A referendum was held in 1988, in which voters were asked whether they wanted to "alter the Constitution to provide for four-year maximum terms for members of both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament". Constitutional referenda in Australia are inherently difficult to pass due to the requirement that the proposal be approved by most voters and by the majority of states.

Voters were particularly reticent on this issue. Less than 33% of voters voted in favour of the proposition and



no states voted in favour. A parliamentary committee report found that despite widespread support for increased federal parliamentary terms, the proposal was defeated because it was combined with other more contentious proposals.

More recently, the then Opposition Labor Leader, Kevin Rudd went to the 2007 election promising to hold a referendum on introducing fixed four-year terms for the House and the Senate. Mr Rudd won the election, but no referendum eventuated.

As recently as last year, current Labor Leader Bill Shorten said he believed there was widespread support for reform to deliver four-year fixed terms, and the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull agreed to discuss the idea. Again, no serious proposal for change materialised.

It's not an easy situation to change. As already noted, referenda rarely succeed. History has shown that to have any chance of success the proposal for change must be have fairly broad bi-partisan political support. This is not an easy thing to achieve at the best of times – much less in the increasingly fractured and distrusting electorate.

The public would also have to be on board. This would require an extensive period of public discussion both in terms of the substantive issue and the appropriate wording. Much has been written about the disinformation disseminated ahead of the 'Brexit' referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016 by its opponents. The possibility that a discussion on changing three-year terms could also become bogged in a quagmire ... cannot be discounted.

There's also the complication that a change to the term of the House of Representatives would mean House elections could no longer be timed with Senate elections. Senators currently have six-year terms, with elections held for half the Senate every three years. Voters may not support an increase of Senate terms to eight years. They may also not be enthusiastic about

Australia's short election cycle at a federal level has been the subject of much criticism for decades.

the alternative – having to turn up to vote in separate elections for the House and the Senate.

The most realistic option for change would be to advocate for fixed three-year terms, as recommended in a 2008-09 parliamentary research paper. This could include legislating for fixed three-year terms (except that the constitutionality of such legislation might be open to challenge); or reaching bi-partisan agreement for fixed three-year terms.

Recent political history has shown that a small group of disgruntled MPs within a party can unseat a Prime Minister – even under circumstances that are unclear or unnecessary in the eyes of voters.

Introducing fixed terms would go some way to reducing the uncertainty in Canberra and give our leaders more breathing space to govern effectively.

Election Watch offers independent expert analysis and is based at the Melbourne School of Government, University of Melbourne.

Harper, C (7 May 2019). *Australia needs fixed four-year parliamentary terms*. Retrieved from <http://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au> on 28 July 2020.

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

An extract from 'Australian values and the enduring importance of the nation-state', an Institute of Public Affairs report by Daniel Wild, Dr Zachary Gorman and Andrew Bushnell

One of the keys to increasing democratic accountability and people's faith in our political institutions is localism. Political decisions should be made at the most local level possible because this allows people to have greater influence over the decisions that affect their lives. At a basic level this means keeping the scope of government as small as possible – the most localised decisions are those made by individuals. As a general rule, individuals have the greatest insight into what is best for themselves and what will make them happy. A smaller government lessens the need for the unaccountable bureaucrats identified above. We have a government which is now too large for the Parliament itself to keep track of; the very facilitator of Australian democracy is being crushed by the weight of what it itself created.

FEDERALISM

The most immediate way in which the Federal Government can be brought back to a size capable of parliamentary management and through which the principles of localism can be fostered is a reinvigorated federalism. The federation process was a deliberate act of deciding what issues needed to be made at a national level and the conclusion was clear.⁵⁷ Australians only ever consented to inherently national decisions like those over tariffs and defence to be made by the Federal Government, everything else was *deliberately* left to the States and nothing barring a referendum can legitimately alter that fact.

Despite the democratically articulated will of the Australian people the size of the Federal Government has greatly expanded into areas like health and education. The tools of that expansion are well known: the attached conditions of section 109, the external affairs power and other parts of the constitution interpreted more broadly than their drafters ever intended, and a monopoly on the major sources of taxation. Almost all of this has been facilitated by the actions of the unelected High Court.

Only the Federal Government has the power to end this detrimental status quo. It must not look to the initiative of State Governments themselves. The phenomenon of 'vertical fiscal imbalance', whereby the Commonwealth Government raises revenues in excess of its spending responsibilities, while State governments have insufficient revenue from their own sources to finance spending responsibilities, actually benefits the States. They seldom have to deal with the negative press that comes with increasing taxes, meanwhile when they have to curtail spending they can blame their commonwealth counterparts.

State Governments seem happy to avoid the accountability of raising revenue at the level it will be spent, as was demonstrated by their opposition to the Turnbull Government's short-lived proposal to give income

taxing powers back to the States.⁵⁸ This is a negative for democracy and suggests that there is a self-interested mindset that has taken hold of the political class.

ELECTORAL REFORM

The self-interest of the ruling class is also demonstrated in calls for longer and fixed terms. This zombie idea is promoted on the basis that short election cycles lead to short-term policy making.⁵⁹ But if the voters vote for short-term thinking that is their prerogative. The political class should not operate on the pretence that it knows better than the people who are the source of the authority they exercise.

When it does it can undermine even the most well-tryed of liberal democratic systems, as demonstrated by the current crisis in the United Kingdom. The fact that this issue continues to be canvassed is all the more remarkable considering the outcome of the 1988 referendum allowing for flexible four-year terms. This saw a 'yes' vote of less than 33 per cent and an outright rejection in all States.⁶⁰ As the issues discussed in this essay reveal, this is no time for politicians to be evading the scrutiny of voters.⁶¹

Reform must involve politicians becoming more rather than less accountable to the people who elect them. We can expand democratic accountability and increase the representativeness of the Parliament by increasing the number of Members of Parliament. Members would represent clearer 'communities of interest' rather than great swathes of population that have little or nothing in common. Australia's population has grown by two-thirds since the last significant increase in the size of the House of Representatives in 1984, leading to bloated electorates that undermine the direct connection between the people and the federal parliament, particularly in rural areas.⁶²

The main impediment to increasing the size of the House of Representatives is the nexus clause, a constitutional provision which mandates that the House of Representatives be as nearly as practicable twice the size of the Senate.⁶³ Any increase in the size of the House of Representatives must thus be accompanied by an increase in the size of the Senate. The major political parties have been wary of expanding the House because it would result in Senators requiring a lower quota of votes to get elected, and therefore more representation for members of minor parties. Minor parties are arguably necessary to display the variety of views inevitable in a democracy but the political class has viewed them negatively – as demonstrated by even the discussion paper for the inquiry that prompted this paper. This has produced the perverse outcome whereby democratic representation in the Lower House is being held back on account of a fear of the consequences of democratic representation in the Upper House.

There may be a case for amending the nexus clause to allow for future increases in the size of the House of

Representatives with less complication. However, given the difficulty of amending the constitution and the failure of the 1967 referendum on the issue, the better approach is to increase the House even if that means increasing the Senate. It is time for the established political parties to recognise the opportunity that an expansion of Parliament represents: greater representation will increase their legitimacy, and ultimately their ability to influence the policy direction of the country.

Finally, it should be noted that democratic accountability does not necessarily entail direct democracy. Direct democracy – getting the general public to vote directly on specific issues – while potentially a useful avenue for channeling the frustrations of mainstream Australians, does not offer the prospect of long-term solutions to the challenges outlined in this paper.

Direct democracy for the most part merely changes the method of political decision making. If that decision making is carried out on a national scale each individual will still have limited influence, in some respects less influence because they can no longer lobby their local member and thus lose an important conduit of representative democracy. Translating the results of a referendum or plebiscite into law can be difficult where the result is contrary to the expectation of the political class: the failure of the British establishment to implement Brexit reveals that the problem of failing and corruption of political institutions cannot be resolved simply by bypassing them.

On top of this, direct democracy does nothing to overcome the tyranny of the majority. Local communities and regions can still be overwhelmed and dictated to, leaving them alienated by the political process. This is one of the reasons why the referendum mechanism for changing the constitution requires the consent of a majority of the people in a majority of States, thus ensuring that NSW and Victoria cannot dominate the rest of the country. Direct democracy therefore presents as a simplistic approach to difficult problems of political organisation and legitimacy, and should be reserved for constitutional issues.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONS

There are other ways in which democratic accountability could be improved by carrying the principle of localism beyond federalism. Australia's system of local government was introduced with the intent of making people aware that government expenditure was 'putting a burden on their own backs'; that is, the relationship between the people making political decisions and who those decisions would effect would be as direct as possible.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, many voters now pay little attention to local elections as seemingly the least important of their three franchises, and this makes councils comparatively unaccountable.

One remedy is to give states and local authorities more control over schools, hospitals, and services. This should not only lead to better decision making about issues directly affecting the local community, it will also give the electorate a reason to pay attention to local

government elections.

Regional areas in particular need greater local control. Environmental legislation is increasingly drafted by city-based politicians and bureaucrats with little knowledge or regard for local conditions or the necessities of agriculture. The most egregious example of this is the Murray-Darling Basin plan which has created unnecessary hardships for farmers.⁶⁵

Similarly, restrictive land clearing laws have been known to accelerate bushfires, not only undermining any intended environmental impact but risking lives in the process.⁶⁶ One option is to create new states that are smaller, less city-centric and more responsive to the needs of their people, but this would only be worth considering once the principles of federalism are fully restored.

ENDNOTES

57. John Quick and Robert Garran (1901), *Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
58. Michael Koziol (2016), "States could collect income tax under radical plan backed by Malcolm Turnbull", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March 2016, www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/states-could-collect-income-tax-under-radical-plan-to-be-discussed-at-coag-20160330-gntoar.html [accessed 25 September 2019].
59. Cathy Harper (2019), "Australia needs fixed four-year parliamentary terms", *Election Watch*, 7 May 2019, <https://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au/articles/australia-needs-fixed-four-year-parliamentary-terms>
60. Australian Electoral Commission (2012), as above.
61. Andrew Bushnell and Daniel Wild (2017), "Four-year terms are a bad idea", *Spectator Australia*, 24 February 2017, www.spectator.com.au/2017/02/four-year-terms-bad-idea/ [accessed 25 September 2019].
62. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019), 'Population', www.abs.gov.au/Population [accessed 25 September 2019].
63. Zachary Gorman and Gregory Melleuish (2018), 'The Nexus Clause: A peculiarly Australian obstacle', *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, Volume 5, Issue 1.
64. Zachary Gorman (2018), *Sir Joseph Carruthers: Founder of the New South Wales Liberal Party*, Brisbane: Connor Court.
65. Murray Darling Basin Citizens' Association (2019), "The MDBA's man made drought: Topher Field", accessed 23 September 2019, <https://mdbca.com/2019/05/09/the-mdbas-man-made-drought-topher-field/>, *ABC News* (2011), "Suicides linked to basin plan", [accessed 23 September 2019], www.abc.net.au/news/2011-01-03/suicides-linked-to-basin-plan/1892504.
66. Ean Higgins (2019), "Queensland land clearing laws made bushfires worse: report", *The Australian*, 17 July 2019, www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/queensland-land-clearing-laws-made-bushfires-worse-report/news-story/15b7deb5a001b916ecd398eb0544b4c7 [accessed 25 September 2019].

The Institute of Public Affairs is an independent, non-profit public policy think tank, dedicated to preserving and strengthening the foundations of economic and political freedom.

Daniel Wild is Director of Research, **Dr Zachary Gorman** is Research Fellow, **Andrew Bushnell** is Research Fellow.

© Copyright 2019 Institute of Public Affairs.

Wild, D, Gorman, Z, and Bushnell, A (September 2019). *Australian values and the enduring importance of the nation-state*. pp. 36-39. Retrieved from <http://ipa.org.au> on 28 July 2020.

THE THREE MOST POWERFUL CHECKS AGAINST CORRUPTION

AUSTRALIA
SCORE: 77/100
RANK: 12/180

Corruption Perceptions Index report from **Transparency International** puts Australia in 12th place, scoring 77 points on the 100-point scale

Our rank has gone up one point compared to last year, but this is only because Canada and the United Kingdom have each slid down the ranking, inadvertently nudging Australia up.

Since 2012, Australia has slid 8 points in Transparency International's global corruption ranking, and this downward trajectory is cause for concern. It followed a similar, though less dramatic, trajectory to Australians' crashing satisfaction with democracy, which has halved this past decade.

This year's CPI research highlights what the countries at the top, or the 'cleanest' countries, do have in common. These countries all share similar characteristics in a robust rule of law, independent institutions that provide oversight over political decisions, and a public with a low tolerance for corruption.

These are the very institutions and expressions that we must value and strengthen to prevent and stop corruption. Unfortunately, for a number of years the very institutions that keep us honest have been sorely tested.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STOP CORRUPTION



**MANAGE
CONFLICTS OF
INTEREST**



**CONTROL
POLITICAL
FINANCING**



**STRENGTHEN
ELECTORAL
INTEGRITY**



**REGULATE
LOBBYING
ACTIVITIES**



**TACKLE
PREFERENTIAL
TREATMENT**



**EMPOWER
CITIZENS**



**REINFORCE
CHECKS AND
BALANCES**

ROBUST RULE OF LAW

A robust rule of law goes hand in hand with an accountable and transparent government. It entails clear and accessible laws, an independent and impartial judiciary, and effective public institutions.

Last year, three high-profile whistle-blowers faced closed courts for blowing the whistle on egregious government behaviour. Witness K, who blew the whistle on Australian Government spying on East Timor to secure more favourable terms for an oil and gas treaty; Richard Boyle alleged improper use of debt-collection powers; and David McBride, a former military lawyer charged with leaking secret documents to journalists. Later in the year, Witness J emerged in Canberra – a secret man, who was trialled in secret and whose sentence remains a secret.

The laws around public sector whistleblowing are so unclear as to provide very little understanding on what can or cannot be said, or what is or is not in public interest. The abuse of powers by the Australian Government has not been put on trial. Transparency International Australia has long been calling for better protections for public sector whistleblowers.

The Government has used 'national security' as an excuse to thwart any legal requirement or public expectation to be transparent, shielding its decision from any scrutiny that would normally hold it to account. This is a worrying trend, and one we must watch and continually question.

INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

Independent institutions oversee government decisions and policy implementation and ensure they are serving the public's best interest, with efficient and fair use of public resources.

On January 15, the Auditor-General published an investigation into the Community Sport Infrastructure Grants scheme and delivered a scathing assessment. It found \$100 million was not awarded to community organisations based on merit and need, but rather allocated to those in politically valuable seats.

Our independent public institutions provide powerful checks and balances. A number of them have come under attack, have been defunded, maligned or stacked with former politicians.

Since 2013 for example, Government has appointed 60 people with Liberal National Party affiliations to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, a body that reviews decisions by government. Insufficient funding for the functions of the Freedom of Information Commissioner has led to huge bottlenecks and record rejections of FOI requests. Charities and other civil

society organisations have been threatened with funding cuts for engaging in advocacy.

To strengthen the health of Australian democracy, we should value and strengthen the independence of our public institutions and value the role they play holding the government to account.

A national anti-corruption commission is also at the heart of an effective system that works to investigate and stop corruption and promote political integrity. The Australian public overwhelmingly agrees we need one. It's time we saw some action on establishing an anti-corruption watchdog, and one with teeth.

THE PUBLIC

The public's low tolerance for corruption, or to use TI's words, 'broad societal consensus against the misuse of public office and resources for private interests' is a powerful check against corruption. The public holds the powerful to account, but they need the media to shine a light on corruption or misconduct. Together, these are powerful forces against corruption. For example, when news broke that Bronwyn Bishop spent \$5,000 to charter a helicopter to attend a Liberal party fundraising event, the public outcry forced her to resign as Speaker less than a month afterwards.

However, over the past few years we have witnessed worrying attacks on press freedom – brought into stark view last year when the Australian Federal Police raided journalists' homes and offices. This goes hand in hand with the extraordinary attacks against whistleblowers who have dared expose corruption and misconduct.

Meanwhile last year we saw concerning rhetoric to intimidate protesters – such as the Minister for Home Affairs suggesting 'mandatory or minimum' jail terms and advocating distributing protesters' names and photographs far and wide.

Democracy does not happen once every couple of years at the ballot box – it is a continual expression of what we want our nation to represent and how we want our public funds to be spent. Australian democracy needs loud Australians, for loud Australians are what flex our democratic muscles, loud Australians make our democracy stronger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2019 CPI report highlights seven recommendations to stop corruption and restore political integrity. Most of these would not surprise the casual Australian observer, or at least not the 78 per cent of Australians who support real-time reporting of political donations, or the 79 per cent who want politicians to disclose who they are meeting with, or the two-thirds who want a national anti-corruption commission.

The CPI report provides yet more evidence of what many would already suspect. There is a clear correlation between the lack of transparency of political donations and corruption; and there is a clear correlation between countries that are corrupt and governments that only consult a narrow band of friends and allies to inform their decision.



Democracy does not happen once every couple of years at the ballot box – it is a continual expression of what we want our nation to represent and how we want our public funds to be spent.

To safeguard and strengthen our democracy we close the loopholes in a system that tempt corruption – such as political financing and revolving doors – and we must value and strengthen transparency and accountability and the very institutions and people who hold the powerful to account.

- **Manage conflicts of interest**, including by stopping the 'revolving door' that allows politicians and senior public servants to jump from public office to company payroll, and vice versa, far too quickly. We need greater cooling-off periods, and they must be enforced.
- **Control political financing**, including by having political parties properly disclose sources of income.
- **Strengthen electoral integrity**, including by preventing and sanctioning vote-buying and misinformation campaigns.
- **Regulate lobbying activities**, including by making lobbying transparent.
- **Tackling preferential treatment**, including by ensuring public funds are not allocated according to personal connections or biased towards special interest groups at the expense of the overall public good.
- **Empower citizens**, by protecting civil liberties and political rights, including protecting citizen activists, whistleblowers and journalists in monitoring and exposing corruption.
- **Reinforce checks and balances**, including by promoting the separation of powers, and strengthening judicial independence.

Transparency International Australia (23 January 2020).
The three most powerful checks against corruption.
Retrieved from <http://transparency.org.au> on 28 July 2020.

How big money influenced the last federal election – and what we can do to fix the system

Big money matters in Australian elections more than ever, and donations are highly concentrated among a small number of powerful individuals, businesses and unions. By Grattan Institute's **Kate Griffiths, Danielle Wood and Tony Chen**

Amid the ongoing bushfire and coronavirus crises – and the political kerfuffle surrounding the Nationals and Greens – you'd be forgiven for missing the annual release of the federal political donations data this week.

Nine months after the 2019 federal election, voters finally get a look at who funded the political parties' campaigns. The data reveals that big money matters in Australian elections more than ever, and donations are highly concentrated among a small number of powerful individuals, businesses and unions.

These are significant vulnerabilities in Australia's democracy and reinforce why substantial reforms are needed to prevent wealthy interests from exercising too much influence in Australian politics.

The political parties rely heavily on major donors, and as a result, major donors get significant access to ministers.

Largest donations in Australian political history

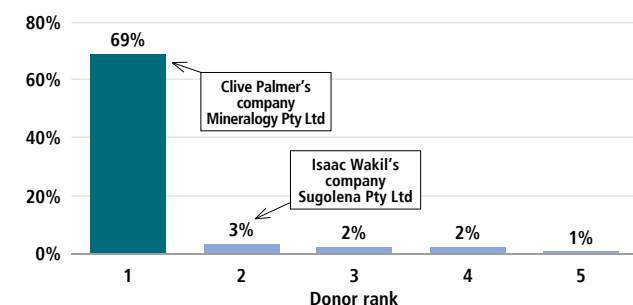
The big story of the 2019 election was Clive Palmer, who donated A\$84 million via his mining company Mineralogy to his own campaign – a figure that dwarfs all other donations as far back as the records go. The previous record – also held by Palmer – was A\$15 million at the 2013 election.

While Palmer failed to win any seats last year, he ran a substantial anti-Labor advertising campaign, and claimed credit for the Coalition's victory.

There are obviously many factors in an election win, but this raises a serious question: how much influence should we allow any single interest to hold over the

Clive Palmer contributed an unprecedented share of total donations

Share of total declared donations

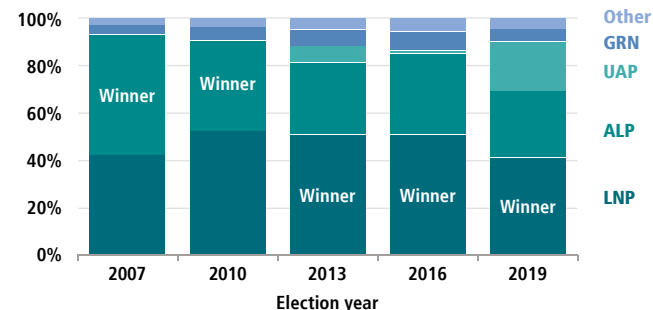


Notes: Associated entities are included. Parties were not required to declare donation of less than \$13,800, but the ALP and the Greens have set lower disclosure thresholds (\$1,000 and \$1,500 respectively).

Source: Grattan analysis of party declarations to AEC 2018-19.

The party spending the most has won 4 out of 5 of the past elections

Share of total expenditure by party



Notes: Associated entities are included. Parties were not required to declare donation of less than \$13,800, but the ALP and the Greens have set lower disclosure thresholds (\$1,000 and \$1,500 respectively).

Source: Grattan analysis of AEC Transparency Register (multiple years).

national debate, especially during the critically important election period?

Several other large donors also emerged at this election. A A\$4 million donation to the Liberal Party from the company Sugolena, owned by a private investor and philanthropist, takes the prize for the largest-ever non-Palmer donation.

Businessman Anthony Pratt donated about A\$1.5 million to each of the major parties through his paper and packaging company Pratt Holdings. The hotels lobby, which has been influential in preventing pokies reforms in past state and federal elections, also donated about A\$500,000 to the Coalition and A\$800,000 to Labor.

Money buys access and sometimes influence

A 2018 Grattan Institute report, *Who's in the room? Access and influence in Australian politics*, showed how money can buy relationships and political connections. The political parties rely heavily on major donors, and as a result, major donors get significant access to ministers.

While explicit quid pro quo is probably rare, the risk is in more subtle influences – that donors get more access to policymakers and their views are given more weight. These risks are exacerbated by a lack of transparency in dealings between policymakers and special interests.

Big money improves the chances of influence. But it also matters to election outcomes.

Looking back at the past five federal elections, an interesting correlation is evident: the party with the biggest war chest tends to form government.

It's only a sample of five, and it's unclear whether higher spending drives the election result or donors simply get behind the party most likely to win.

But in 2019, Labor was widely expected to win, so its smaller war chest supports the proposition that money assists in delivering power.

What policymakers should do to protect Australia's democracy

Money in politics needs to be better regulated to reduce the risk of interest groups “buying” influence – and elections. Real transparency is the first step. Half of private funding remains hidden from public view due to Australia's high disclosure threshold and loopholes in the federal donations rules.

Big money improves the chances of influence. But it also matters to election outcomes.

Only donations of more than A\$14,000 need to be on the public record, and political parties don't have to aggregate multiple donations below the threshold from the same donor – meaning major donors can simply split their donations to hide their identity.

Parliament should improve the transparency of political donations by:

- Lowering the federal donations disclosure threshold to A\$5,000, so all donations big enough to matter are on the public record;
- Requiring political parties to aggregate multiple donations from the same donor, so big donors can't hide
- Requiring quicker release of donations data, so voters have information on who funds elections during the campaign – not nine months later.

These simple rule changes would bring Australia's federal political donations regime in line with most states and OECD nations. The current regime leaves voters in the dark.

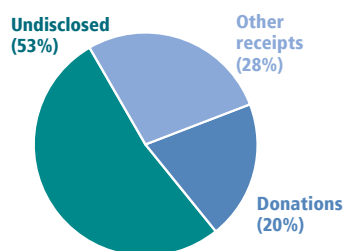
But the donations data shows transparency is not enough to protect Australia's democracy from the influence of a handful of wealthy individuals. Ultimately, to reduce the influence of money in politics, parliament should introduce an expenditure cap during election campaigns.

Parties and candidates can currently spend as much money as they can raise, so big money means greater capacity to sell your message to voters.

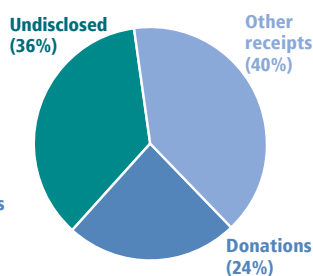
Capping political expenditure by political parties – and third parties – would reduce the influence of wealthy individuals. And it would reduce the donat-

There's a lot of private money we know nothing about

LNP private income, 2018-19
\$123 million



ALP private income, 2018-19
\$77 million



Source: Grattan analysis of AEC data, 2018-19.



ions “arms race” between the major parties, giving senior politicians more time to do their job instead of chasing dollars.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The Grattan Institute began with contributions to its endowment of \$15 million from each of the Federal and Victorian Governments, \$4 million from BHP Billiton, and \$1 million from NAB. In order to safeguard its independence, Grattan Institute's board controls this endowment. The funds are invested and contribute to funding Grattan Institute's activities. Grattan Institute also receives funding from corporates, foundations, and individuals to support its general activities as disclosed on its website.

Danielle Wood and Tony Chen do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and have disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Kate Griffiths is a Fellow at the Grattan Institute.

Danielle Wood is a Friend of The Conversation and Program Director, Budget Policy and Institutional Reform at the Grattan Institute.

Tony Chen is a Researcher at the Grattan Institute.

THE CONVERSATION

Griffiths, K, Wood, D, and Chen, T (4 February 2020). *How big money influenced the 2019 federal election – and what we can do to fix the system*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

WHY DO I HAVE TO VOTE, ANYWAY?

WITHOUT COMPULSORY VOTING, AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY WOULD LOOK VERY DIFFERENT, OBSERVES **LISA HILL**

Before too long Australians will be heading off to the polls. As usual there will be complaints from those who object to being required to vote when the majority of Western democracies remain voluntary.

Yet almost of all those voluntary settings are battling escalating turnout decline and, with it, the slow death of representative democracy. Australians continue to enjoy turnout levels that are the envy of voluntary-voting regimes the world over.

WHY HAVE COMPULSORY VOTING?

Australia has one of the oldest systems of compulsory voting. Queensland was the first Australian state to introduce it in 1914, but voting did not become compulsory at the federal level until 1924. Compulsory voting was adopted to tackle the problem of low voter turnout. At the time, it hovered below 60%.

It turned out to be an extremely decisive and well-accepted remedy. After its introduction, turnout surged

dramatically to more than 90% of registered voters. It has stayed that way ever since.

Compulsory voting can therefore improve turnout by up to 30 percentage points. Conversely, when a well-established democratic system abandons it, turnout drops steeply by between 20 and 30 percentage points, as happened recently in Chile.

Critics of compulsory voting often claim there are equally effective, voluntary means for raising voter turnout. But compulsory voting is the only really reliable and decisive means for keeping turnout high. And its effect is immediate.

There are several sound reasons for requiring people to vote. When everyone votes, governments are more legitimate. People tend to think of democracy as a constitutional form but, really, it is an activity constituted by the political participation of citizens. Unless it is performed it only exists in theory.

There are many ways of performing democracy. But

COMPULSORY VOTING: YES OR NO?

Voting for all three levels of government in Australia – federal, state, municipal – remains compulsory, in spite of some ongoing debate over making it voluntary. Arguments include:

FOR

1. Voting is a democratic duty, and an essential feature of Australian citizenship, akin to other civic requirements such as taxation, jury duty and compulsory education.
2. Compulsory voting engages people to become educated in political participation, encouraging informed decisions.
3. Under compulsory voting, parliaments truly reflect the will of all constituents; winning candidates legitimately reflect the majority of voters, whereas in places like the US candidates can win without having a majority of votes.
4. Compulsory voting does not actually compel choice; because it is a secret ballot, voters can always lodge a blank or spoiled ballot paper.
5. Governments must address the needs of the total electorate in policy formulation and management. If voting were voluntary, poorer and less educated people would tend not to vote, thereby skewing the political system to the more affluent and educated.
6. Candidates are able to concentrate their campaigning energies on issues rather than encouraging all voters to attend the polls.
7. Compulsory voting ensures the political system remains responsive to the will of the people, encouraging political diversity beyond the major parties (ie. independents and micro parties) to contest elections without spending vast amounts of money to get voters to the polls.

SOURCES

- Vote Australia (2019), *Compulsory Voting*, www.voteaustralia.org.au/compulsory_voting
- Australian Electoral Commission (2020), *Compulsory voting in Australia*, https://aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/voting/index.htm
- State Library of New South Wales (2019), *Hot Topics: Voting and elections*, Chapter 5: Compulsory voting – for and against, <https://legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot-topics-voting-and-elections/compulsory-voting-and-against>

AGAINST

1. Compulsory voting is an infringement of liberty; it is undemocratic to compel people to vote.
2. Disinterested and ill-informed voters are forced to the polls; many voters are no more politically educated than citizens in other countries which offer voluntary voting, e.g. New Zealand, US and UK.
3. Compulsory voting increases the number of donkey votes and informal votes by people who only vote because they have to; it reduces the legitimacy of elected representatives.
4. Compulsory voting forces voters to choose someone, even if they do not personally support any of the candidates on offer.
5. It increases the number of safe, single-member electorates – political parties then concentrate on the marginal electorates and entice them with disproportionate funding to win votes (pork barrelling), overlooking the needs of the total electorate.
6. Resources must be allocated to determine whether those who failed to vote have “valid and sufficient” reasons.
7. Compulsory voting has rendered the political system unresponsive; voluntary voting would prompt political candidates and parties to campaign harder and do more to convince voters of the merits of their policies in order to get them to the polling booths.

voting is the most consequential and, arguably, least demanding method, especially in well-run systems such as Australia's. Through voting, we sign up to the political community and enter into a partnership with other members so that together we can constitute democracy as it is meant to be:

*Government of the people, by the people,
for the people.*

Because the one-vote one-value principle is embodied in democratic practice and ensured through almost complete participation, voting in Australia is one of the few activities that allow us to express our equality with other citizens and to exercise our interests equally in self-government and self-protection.

This is why participation should be universal. If only a few participate, the political community is only partially and lopsidedly constituted. All must join with all, not some with some, especially when that "some" turns out to be the prosperous and well-educated as is invariably the case in voluntary systems.

DOES COMPULSORY VOTING DO ANY GOOD?

Compulsory voting regimes have lower levels of corruption. They also have higher levels of satisfaction with the way democracy is working than do voluntary systems. In compulsory voting regimes – where just about everybody votes – government attention and spending is more evenly distributed across social classes.

Governments are more representative and therefore more democratic when everyone votes.

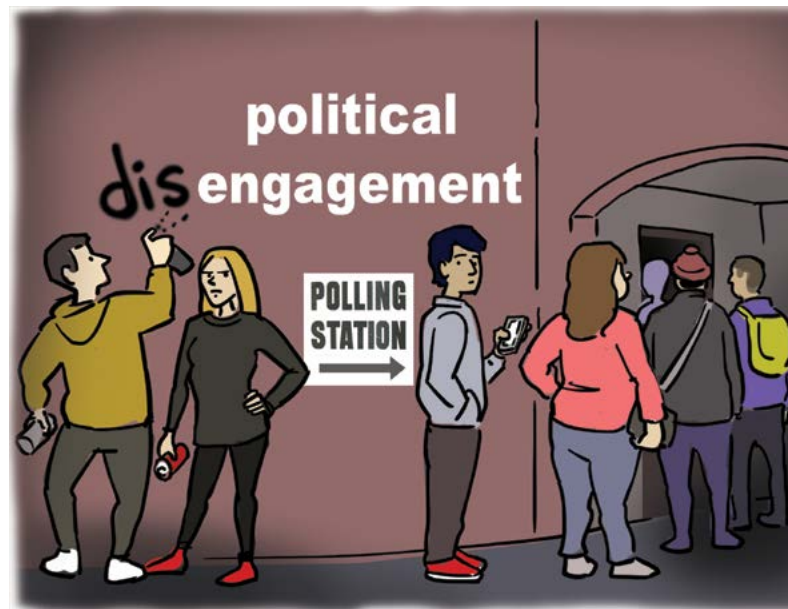
More evenly distributed government attention means more even wealth distribution. As a result, compulsory voting settings enjoy lower levels of wealth inequality. It is no coincidence that when compulsory voting was first introduced in Australia there was a dramatic increase in pension spending. When everyone votes, governments are more representative.

Some say compulsory voting causes the electoral process to be clogged with too many incompetent and ignorant voters who vote "badly". Higher turnout, they say, brings a higher proportion of informal and "donkey" votes that distort electoral outcomes.

Some claim that high turnout elections are characterised by a higher proportion of voters who are incapable of even voting in their own interests. With regard to the last claim, high levels of turnout actually correlate with governments that are more responsive to the needs and priorities of the entire electorate. That is, governments are more representative and therefore more democratic when everyone votes. So, somehow or other, poorer and less well-educated voters, no matter how badly they perform on political knowledge surveys, do seem to know what they are doing.

HOW BAD IS THE 'BAD VOTING' PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA?

Informal voting tends to be higher in compulsory voting



regimes. This is because people whose first language isn't English, less well-educated, and poorer members of the electorate have been brought into the voting process. These electors, while clear about how they want to vote, have a hard time casting a valid ballot due to factors associated with their disadvantage.

Yet these informal votes do little harm because they are not counted. Therefore, they are incapable of distorting outcomes. Also, the donkey vote – where voters mindlessly number their ballots from top to bottom or in reverse – only accounts for around 1% of total votes cast in Australia. This is actually lower than in many systems where voting is voluntary such as the US, where the figure has been estimated at between 2% and 4%.

Compelling people to vote seems to increase their political knowledge. This is partly because voters choose to inform themselves when they know they have to vote and partly because the voting process "imparts incidental knowledge". And it causes that knowledge to be spread more evenly throughout the citizenry.

Without compulsory voting, Australian democracy would look very different. Turnout would likely drop to around 60% or lower and governments would be less representative. There would be lower levels of satisfaction with the political system. The electorate would be less politically informed. We would also have greater wealth inequality and more corruption.

In any case, the majority (more than 70%) of Australians approve of compulsory voting – and have done so for decades. The nay-sayers continue to be a minority.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Lisa Hill receives funding from the Australian Research Council.

Lisa Hill is Professor of Politics, University of Adelaide.

THE CONVERSATION

Hill, L (30 June 2016). *Election explainer: why do I have to vote anyway?* Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 27 August 2020.

SHOULD AUSTRALIA LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16? WE ASKED FIVE EXPERTS

SASHA PETROVA FROM **THE CONVERSATION** ASKED FIVE EXPERTS THEIR VIEWS ON LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Voting is a key part of the democratic process. It allows all citizens of a certain age to have a say on matters important to them. Voting in federal elections and referendums is compulsory for every Australian aged 18 and over. But decisions made by elected governments – especially in areas such as education, health and energy – impact young people too. Legal and political voices have long called for Australia to lower the voting age to 16. After all, people under 18 can leave school, get a job, drive a car and pay taxes. So why not vote? A parliamentary inquiry is currently looking into the issue. In the meantime, we asked five experts their views. Here's what they said.



FIVE OUT OF FIVE EXPERTS SAID 'YES'. HERE ARE THEIR DETAILED RESPONSES:

Helen Berents, Lecturer in youth justice

Lowering the voting age would allow young people who already are politically and socially engaged in their communities to formally participate in our democracy. Enfranchising young people would provoke a more diverse political dialogue that would be beneficial for all Australians. Often youth are depicted as apathetic. This has significant implications because it ignores the reality that many of the formal mechanisms for communicating with youth have been removed by successive governments. For example, there is no current Minister or Office for Youth.

When methods of communication as well as political issues of significance to youth – higher education funding, affordable housing, climate change among many others – are sidelined by governments, it tells youth their voice doesn't matter. Providing a formal avenue for youth participation by lowering the voting age would recognise the valuable contribution youth can make, enhance political engagement with all Australians, and bolster representativeness in our federal parliament.

Jean-Paul Gagnon, Political philosopher

History – across language, time, and space – is peppered with tensions about the boundaries to political participation, in this case voting. Progressives have fought and won against arbitrary exclusions to participation formed by the powerful. Think about it: in some cases only men of a certain age were allowed to vote; in others it was about title; while in others it depended on where you were from, how much property you owned, and so on. Were any of these absolutist positions logically defensible? No, and certainly not in the face of the 'one person, one vote' principle. That's why these arbitrary positions crumbled in confrontation with more democratic logic.

If a 16-year-old asks, 'am I allowed to vote?', what viable counter-argument would one have? The 'you're too young' line, arguably the most popular, doesn't hold water, if only because some teenagers can outsmart their grandparents in different policy fields or vice versa. We're better off working together across generations, drawing on each other's expertise, and crafting a polity of more ages and not a polity guarded by ageists.

Lisa Hill, Professor of politics

However, I'd love to see a trial of this first. I'm a little conflicted as voting requires moral maturity. It's something to be taken

seriously. But we have low and declining turnout among young Australians and that worries me. Research suggests those who vote for the first time at 16-17 years-old are more likely than 18-20 year-old first-timers to stay in the habit. Ideally a trial would be conducted in a single jurisdiction. Preferably, it would be accompanied by a compulsory class in school on the value and mechanics of voting with a focus (and even test) on how to cast a formal vote, since the young are more likely to vote informally.

Louise Phillips, Lecturer in education

Young people are politically aware. They know about, and have rational opinions on, contemporary political issues. We all mature at differing rates and age is not the sole determinant of political awareness. I would recommend youth voters be offered the chance to participate in elections voluntarily, so those who vote are voting to enact their political right, rather than for compliance – which spurs ill-considered and donkey votes. Shifts for the inclusion of political enfranchisement for women, working class and Indigenous Australians was enabled through broader social support. Nearly 80% of Australians are in support of 15-18 year-olds having opportunities to influence government decisions, which includes voting in elections.

Philippa Collin, Social scientist

My research shows that young people are increasingly engaged in more diverse, issues-oriented and digitally-enabled forms of political participation and civic engagement. They also recognise the role governments and politicians have on their lives and the society they live in. Lowering the voting age would give substance to the views of government and civil actors about the virtues of youth participation in community and government decision-making. It would also likely have a positive effect on participation by helping young people enrol, and think about how to use their vote, at a time when most are still in school or connected to family or other support networks. Extending the franchise is definitely not the only thing formal democratic institutions should do to improve the way they engage with young people, but it would be a good start.

Sasha Petrova is Section Editor, Education at The Conversation.

THE CONVERSATION

Petrova, S (27 March 2019). Should Australia lower the voting age to 16? We asked five experts. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 July 2020.

EXPLORING ISSUES

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| BRAINSTORM | 54 |
| DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES | 55 |
| MULTIPLE CHOICE | 56 |



Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about democracy in Australia.

1. What is the meaning of the word 'democracy', and what are its origins?

2. Explain the different roles of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the Australian Parliament.

3. Explain the preferential voting system, and how it is used in Australia?

4. Explain the principle of 'separation of powers' in relation to democracy in Australia.



Form into groups of two or more people. Choose a side to debate the following topics – FOR or AGAINST. In your groups, discuss and prepare your reasoning by brainstorming opinions and determining your key arguments. Research examples, references and sources to back up your case for each topic. In a structured debate-style presentation, present your line of reasoning with an opposing group in the class.

-
- This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

- [illegible]



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of this page.

1. In what year did the Australian Constitution enter into force?

- a. 1770
- b. 1889
- c. 1901
- d. 1926
- e. 1974
- f. 2001

2. How many members are elected into the House of Representatives in Australia?

- a. 9
- b. 52
- c. 75
- d. 151
- e. 201
- f. 365

3. Who is considered Australia's head of state?

- a. Prime Minister
- b. Parliamentary Speaker
- c. Monarch of the United Kingdom
- d. Governor-General
- e. President of the United States of America
- f. Serjeant-at-Arms

4. What is the name given to an intentional invalid vote?

- a. Whistle vote
- b. Black vote
- c. Donkey vote
- d. Peanut vote
- e. Monkey vote
- f. Red vote

5. Respond to the following statements by circling either 'True' or 'False':

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| a. Queensland was the first state in Australia to introduce compulsory voting in 1914. | True / False |
| b. Australia is considered a direct democracy. | True / False |
| c. Australia operates under a Cabinet system of government but the Cabinet is not even mentioned in the Australian Constitution. | True / False |
| d. In the 2019 election, Clive Palmer donated an unprecedented A\$84 million to his own United Australia Party electoral campaign but failed to win any seats. | True / False |
| e. The role of the Governor-General is elected by the people. | True / False |

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

1 = c; 2 = d; 3 = a; 4 = c; 5 = f (Australia is considered both a representative democracy and a constitutional democracy), c = T, d = T, e = F (The role of the Governor-General is selected by the Prime Minister of the day).

- Australia today has a system of government known as a representative democracy. How our Government works is defined in the Australian Constitution (Australian Constitution Centre, *Democracy*). (p.1)
- Almost half of the world's countries are today considered democracies of some sort. These include constitutional monarchies like Australia and republics such as the USA (*ibid*). (p.1)
- Many believe that democracy sprung up in Ancient Greece. This was a participatory democracy where all male citizens voted on each law. Women and slaves were excluded (*ibid*). (p.1)
- In 1899 and 1900 the people of the colonies voted through referendums to accept the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. Then on 1 January in 1901 the colonies peacefully joined together in a Federation and each colony became a State (*ibid*). (p.2)
- Democracy means rule by the people. The word comes from the ancient Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (to rule). (Parliamentary Education Office, *Democracy*). (p.5)
- The Australian Constitution is a written federal constitution that provides the basic rules for the operation of the nation laid out under 3 separate titles: the Legislature (the Parliament), the Executive (Governor-General and ministers) and the Judiciary (the High Court and other courts) (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, *Australian democracy: an overview*). (p.6)
- The Australian Constitution contains 8 chapters and 128 sections and may be changed by referendum according to the rules set out in section 128 of the Constitution (*ibid*). (p.6)
- There is a total of 9 parliaments across Australia. One federal (or national) parliament, located in Canberra and 6 state parliaments and 2 territory legislative assemblies, located in the capital cities of each state or territory (*ibid*). (p.6)
- Australia operates under a Cabinet system of government, even though the Cabinet is not mentioned in the Constitution (*ibid*). (p.7)
- HM Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of Australia and formally the Australian head of state. The Governor-General represents her in Australia and is in effect the Australian head of state (*ibid*). (p.7)
- There are 151 members elected to the House of Representatives – one for each of Australia's 151 electorates. There is approximately the same number of voters in each electorate (Parliamentary Education Office, *Federal elections*). (p.8)
- The principle of the separation of powers is that, in order to prevent oppressive government, the three powers of government should be held by separate bodies – the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary – which can act as checks and balances on each other (Parliament of Australia, *The Australian system of government*). (p.10)
- Recent research shows that the US has had the largest increase in polarisation since the 1990s, and it is also among the countries with the largest increase in democratic dissatisfaction (Foa, R, and Klassen, AJ, *Where people are satisfied with democracy and why*). (p.14)
- Trust and confidence in government has been steadily declining for years, reaching record lows before the COVID-19 crisis (Transparency International Australia, *The health of our democracy also needs protecting in a crisis*). (p.22)
- A study has shown a clear rise in support for minor parties among voters, while 21% of Australians don't align with any party at all (ANU, *Trust in government hits all-time low*). (p.23)
- Gender differences in voting have changed over time. In the 1990s men were slightly more likely to vote Labor than women. In recent elections women have become more likely to vote Labor (*ibid*). (p.24)
- There is a growing divide between younger and older voters. The 2019 election represented the lowest Liberal party vote on record for those under 35 (23%), and the highest ever vote for the Greens (28%) (*ibid*). (p.24)
- Since 2007 Australia has had 6 prime ministers, as compared to 6 prime ministers in the previous 36 years (1971-2007) (Daly, TG, *Electoral democracy in Australia: crisis, resilience and renewal*). (p.25)
- The most famous contemporary example of a populist leader is the president of the US, Donald Trump, and the renewed interest in populism is partly due to his 2016 electoral success (Bryant, O, and Moffitt, B, *What actually is populism? And why does it have a bad reputation?*). (p.32)
- In a 2018 survey, 85% of Australians thought at least some federal MPs were corrupt (Wood, D, and Griffiths, K, *Submission to inquiry into nationhood, national identity, and democracy*). (p.34)
- From the 1850s, our colonial parliaments extended the vote in radical ways and established basic ideals like the Eight Hour Day that influenced global thinking (University of Melbourne/newDemocracy Foundation/Susan McKinnon Foundation, *Reforming our democracy – options for renewing democracy in Australia*). (p.38)
- From the 1890s, Australia led the way with the suffragettes extending democratic rights for women, literally decades ahead of other nations like the United States and parts of Europe (*ibid*). (p.38)
- Holding federal elections are a huge logistical exercise. Australia has about 16 million enrolled voters, and our compulsory voting system ensures more than 90% participation (Harper, C, *Australia needs fixed four-year parliamentary terms*). (p.42)
- Australia has one of the oldest systems of compulsory voting. Queensland was the first Australian state to introduce it in 1914, but voting did not become compulsory at the federal level until 1924 (Hill, L, *Election explainer: why do I have to vote anyway?*). (p.50)

Ballot

A method of secret voting, normally in a written form.

Compulsory voting

Australian citizens 18 years and over are required by law to vote in federal elections.

Constitution

Principles by which an organisation, including a country or a state, is governed; also refers to the document setting out those principles, such as the Australian Constitution.

Democracy

System of government in which the people have a say about how they are governed, and free elections are held.

Democratic rights

Rights characterised by the principle of political or social equality for all.

Direct democracy

System of government in which citizens participate in making decisions, often by voting in referendums or in public assemblies.

Election

Choosing of a person or a government by voting.

Electorate

All the people in a country or area who are entitled to vote in an election.

Federation

Forming of a nation by the union of a number of states which give up some of their powers and responsibilities to a national government; unification of colonies which formed the Australian nation on 1 January 1901.

Government

System by which affairs of a state or nation are administered; also refers to the ruling party in a state or nation, which has been elected or appointed to be in charge of its administration. There are three levels of government in Australia: federal, state and local.

House of Representatives

One of the two houses of the Australian Parliament, also known as the lower house, in which the Australian Government is formed.

Local government

Management of the affairs of a shire, municipality or town, by people who are usually elected by the residents of that area; people who make up such a management group, usually called a council.

Nation

A large body of people, associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own.

Parliament

An assembly of elected representatives which forms the legislature of a state or a nation. It may have both an upper and a lower house, or one house only.

Political

Dealing with the distribution of power or connected with a political party.

Political freedom

A person's right to express his or her political beliefs freely, and to vote as he or she wants.

Political party

A group of people with similar ideas or aims, some of whose members stand at elections in the hope that they will form or influence the government.

Political rights

Rights that allow a person to participate in political life, including the right to vote, right to hold particular political views, and right to join a political party and influence public life.

Politician

Person who is active in politics, who might hold a political office into which he or she has been voted in an election.

Politics

Business of governing a country; activities involved in gaining or using power.

Preferential voting

A system of voting in which a voter shows an order of preference for candidates, giving the number one to his or her first choice and the last number to the last choice.

Proportional representation

An electoral system such that all political parties are represented in proportion to the percentage of the total vote won by the party. Proportional representation in the Senate is designed to elect multiple senators to represent each state and territory.

Representative democracy

System of government in which electors choose representatives to make decisions for them.

Senate

One of the two houses of the Australian Parliament, also known as the upper house.

State government

A state government is an elected group of people who administer state law, deliver goods and services and make day-to-day decisions on behalf of the people of that state.

States' rights

The powers or entitlements of states in a federal system.

Territory government

An elected group of people who administer territory law, deliver goods and services and make day-to-day decisions on behalf of the people of that territory.

Voting

Formal expression of choice in some matter signified by voice or by ballot.

Websites with further information on the topic

Australian Constitution Centre www.australianconstitutioncentre.org.au
 Australian Election Study <https://australianelectionstudy.org>
 Australian Electoral Commission www.aec.gov.au
 Citizens for Democratic Renewal www.democraticrenewal.org.au
 Constitution Education Fund www.cefa.org.au
 Democracy 2025 www.democracy2025.gov.au
 Election Watch (University of Melbourne) <https://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au>
 Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand www.ecanz.gov.au
 House of Representatives www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives
 Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis www.governanceinstitute.edu.au
 Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House www.moadoph.gov.au
 Parliament of Australia www.aph.gov.au
 Parliamentary Education Office <https://peo.gov.au>
 Senate www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate
 The Conversation Australia <https://theconversation.com/au>
 Transparency International Australia <https://transparency.org.au>
 Vote Australia www.voteaustralia.org.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publisher is grateful to all the contributors to this book for granting permission to reproduce their works.

COPYRIGHT DISCLAIMER

While every care has been taken to trace and acknowledge copyright the publisher tenders its apology for any accidental infringements or where copyright has proved untraceable. The publisher would be pleased to come to a suitable arrangement with the rightful owner.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs and illustrations courtesy of iStock, except infographic on page 5 © Parliamentary Education Office, infographic on page 46 © Transparency International, and cartoon on page 51 by Angelo Madrid.

THANK YOU

- Election Watch
- The Conversation Australia
- Parliamentary Education Office
- Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House.

DISCLAIMER

The Spinney Press is an independent educational publisher and has no political affiliations or vested interests with any persons or organisations whose information appears in the Issues in Society series. The Spinney Press seeks at all times to present variety and balance in the opinions expressed in its publications. Any views quoted in this book are not necessarily those of the publisher or its staff.

Advice in this publication is of a general nature and is not a substitute for independent professional advice. Information contained in this publication is for educational purposes only and is not intended as specific legal advice or to be used to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Further, the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information available in this publication cannot be guaranteed. The Spinney Press, its affiliates and their respective servants and agents do not accept any liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information made available via or through its publications, whether arising from negligence or otherwise.

This e-book is subject to the terms and conditions of a non-exclusive and non-transferable LICENCE AGREEMENT between THE SPINNEY PRESS and: Sandringham College, Sandringham, contact@sandringhamcollegelibrary.com

INDEX

A

Australian Election Study 23-24, 29

C

Cabinet 7, 11, 13, 20 *see also* ministers
citizens

- assemblies 26
- dual 37
- empowering 46, 47
- e-petitions, to parliament 37
- juries 28, 37, 40-41
- panels 40
- participation 5, 26, 40

Commonwealth Integrity Commission (CIC) 34, 35-36, 47

Constitution, Australian 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 41

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic 16-17, 18-20, 21-22

corruption 17, 21-22, 33-34, 35-36, 46-47
Corruption Perceptions Index 46-47

D

democracy

- accountability 44-45
- attitudes towards 27-28
- benefits of 5
- constitutional 4
- decline and renewal of 27
- definitions of 3-4, 5
- direct 4, 45
- evolution of 2
- features of, Australian 6
- framework 3
- health of, Australian 21-22
- ideas of, key 5
- ideals of 5
- illiberal 33
- liberal 3, 5
- monitory 4
- origins of, Australian 1-2
- politics, democratic 27
- practices 4
- principles of 3, 5, 6
- reforms 25-26, 27-28, 33-52
- representative 4, 5, 6, 7, 37
- satisfaction with 14-15, 25, 27-28, 51
 - countries 14, 15, 18, 19, 20
- types of 4
- values, defining 6
- word, meaning 1, 3, 5

E

economic recovery 17, 18-20

elections 39-40, 50-51

- Australian 48-49
- by-elections/casual vacancies 9
- campaigns, advertising/finance of 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 49
- candidate information packs 40

cost of holding 42

cycle, short 42-43

federal 8-9, 48-49

finalising results of 9

electoral *see also* elections; political

democracy 25-26

integrity 46, 47

reform 44

systems 9

electorates, size of 37, 44-45

Executive Council 12, 13

F

Federal Executive Council 12

federalism 41, 44

federation, Australian 2, 6, 7, 10, 41

foreign investment 22

freedom 3

G

government *see also* parliament

accountability 21-22, 35

Australian system of 10-13

executive 10, 10-11, 13

levels of 7

federal 7, 10, 44

local 7, 9, 45

state/territory 7, 10, 20, 42, 44

operations of 40

parliamentary 10

responsible 5, 6

transparency 21-22, 35

trust in 16-17, 18-20, 22, 23-24, 27-28, 29-30, 33-37

Governor-General 7, 11-12, 13

H

head of state 7, 12, 13

High Court 12

House of Representatives 7, 8, 10, 39, 43, 44

J

judicature (judiciary) 6-7, 10, 12

justice 3

L

legislature 10

legitimacy, electoral 3

localism 44

M

media 16, 17, 18, 27, 47

ministers 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 48

see also Cabinet

monarchy 12

Morrison, Prime Minister Scott 18-19, 20, 23

P

parliament 6, 10, 39

Act of Parliament 12, 13

composition of 6, 25

end of 26

expansion of 44-45

operations of 40

parliamentary

code of conduct 34, 36

secretaries 11, 12, 13

sovereignty 6

terms, review of 39, 42-43, 44

political

donations 28, 34, 35, 37, 39, 46, 47, 48-49

lobbying 35, 40, 46, 47

parties 23, 24, 25, 28, 35, 39-40, 48

reform 33-37

scandals 16

trust 27-28, 29-30 *see also*
government, trust in

politicians 33-34, 34, 37

populism 31-32

power 3

Prime Minister 7, 10, 11, 13, 25

public service 40, 46

Q

Queen Elizabeth II 7, 10-11, 12

R

referendum 42, 44, 45

regional areas 45

rule of law 5, 6, 46

S

Senate 7, 8-9, 10, 39, 43, 44

separation of powers 6, 10

sovereign 13 *see also* Queen Elizabeth II

T

Trump, Donald 15, 18-19, 24, 31-32

U

United Kingdom 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 46

Brexit 14-15, 32

United States 14, 18, 19, 20

V

voting

above vs below the line 9

age, lowering 52

compulsory 7, 8, 50-51

donkey votes 51

free, in parliament 39

informal 51

majoritarian/majority 9

plurality/first-past-the-post 9

policy issues for voters 23-24

postal 37

preferential 8, 9

proportional representation 8, 9

systems 9

turnout 50

volatility 25

Y

young people 52